

B A R B A R A

A WOMAN

of the
WEST



JOHN
H
WHITSON





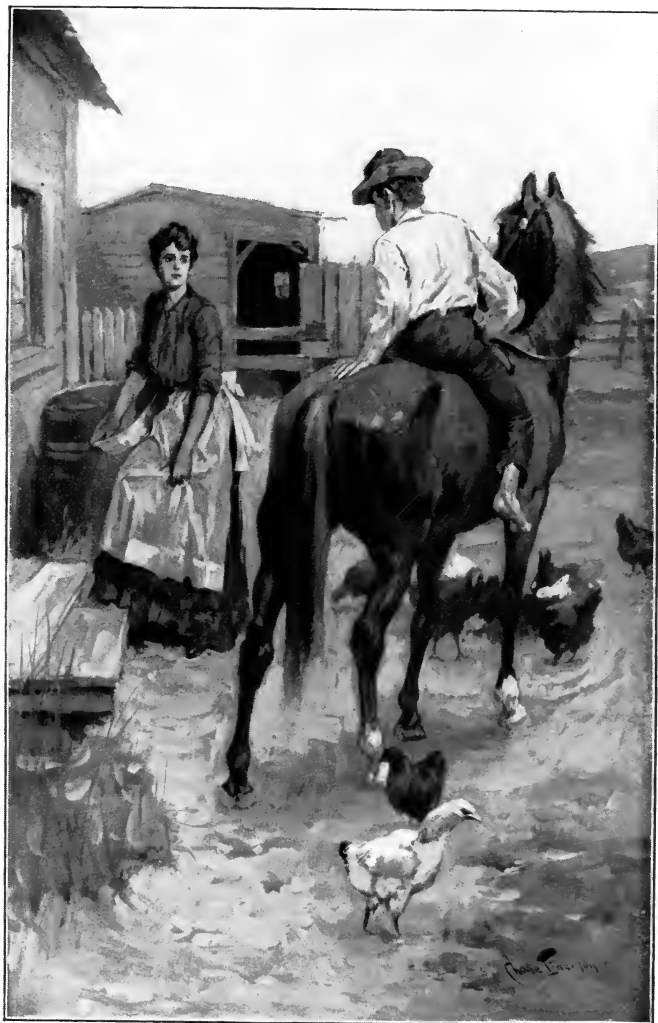




Barbara







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A Woman of the West

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BARBARA

A WOMAN OF THE WEST

CHAPTER I

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

A NEW growth of buffalo grass was tinting the mossy carpet of the plains a dull gray-green. In the flat valley the wild-pea vines sprawled and rioted, and the purple bloom of the loco splotted the slopes of the hills. Out on the tall fence-post that formed a corner of the corral a meadow lark was smoothing the feathers of his yellow vest, disarranged by the bath he had taken in the drinking-trough. Farther away the browsing cattle, in the bluish haze that melted into and obliterated the sky line, grew taller and taller, under the influence of the miragy atmosphere, until they took on the semblance of a fantastic forest and moved like Birnam Wood.

Barbara Timberly came to the door of the "claim" house and looked out. She was not drawn by the quiet beauty of the scene. It

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was all flat, dull, and commonplace to her. What little attraction of novelty claim life had held for her had vanished long since. The cattle in the blue heat-like shimmer gave to her imagination no romantic feeling, and the song of the lark fell on ears that were now deaf to its sweetness.

As she stood thus shading her eyes from the blinding glare of the sun she seemed barely twenty. The trying Kansas wind, which had browned the fair face and the slender uplifted hand, tumbled her hair in a bewitching tangle about her forehead. Her poise was so graceful and her beauty so marked that Roger Timberly, lifting his eyes from the table at which he sat writing, smiled with the pleasure it gave him just to look at her.

The "br-r-r, br-r-r" of drought-loosened spokes and the clatter of light hoofs that had drawn her to the door now sounded more distinctly.

"Some of the neighbors coming?" he asked, putting down his pen and weighting his paper.

A pair of bronchos, drawing a buckboard, were swimming into view through the haze. She scrutinized the figure outlined uncertainly in the seat.

"I don't know yet."

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A minute later she was able to announce the driver as a stranger.

Roger Timberly rose from his chair, lounged to the door, and stood at her side. The house was some distance back from the trail that diagonalled the section, and the approach of a vehicle was an event of sufficient importance to draw their attention.

They stood together in the doorway until the light buckboard drew up at the well and the driver began to climb heavily out over the wheel. He was a man of forty, with tired, dark eyes and a lean, bearded face. The bronchos were sweating freely and straining to get at the water in the trough, and it was evident that the stranger had driven far and hard. As he loosened the reins to permit them to drink he turned toward Roger, who had advanced from the doorway.

"'T ain't no durned funny bizness drivin' over these plains," he commented. "I'm tuckered, an' 'f you kin gimme a hangout over night I'd like to stop. All of fifteen miles yit to Paragon, I reckon?"

"Fully that," said Roger, eyeing his would-be guest. "We're not in the habit of keeping anybody, but —"

"It'd be doin' me a handy turn," the man

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interposed. "I kalkilate that 't ain't favorin' my health any to sleep out when I don't haf' to."

He dipped a bucket of water and held it up to the off broncho, that was being crowded away from the trough by the breast-yoke; and Roger, observing that the hands shook from weakness, looked again at the face, and saw that the stranger was ill and suffering.

"Just wait a minute," he said; "I'll speak to my wife."

He was back by the time the bucket was put down, with the information that the man could stay and was welcome. Then he pointed the way to the small stable, half plank and half sod, where he assisted in unharnessing and feeding the team.

"I can't pay you," the man observed, with some hesitation, giving Roger a sidelong glance out of his tired, dark eyes, and rubbing his lean, bearded face with a knobby forefinger, as they turned toward the house. "Me an' Hard Luck had a tussle out in th' Hills, an' he downed me."

He coughed apologetically.

"We had no thought of charging you anything," Roger assured, stepping along at his side.

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The stranger was as tall as Roger, but he shambled and bent as he walked, and seemed much slighter and shorter.

"I guess I did n't give you my name," he volunteered. "It's Bexar—Joseph Bexar, and I'm a miner and prospector."

Roger introduced himself, and entering the house presented Bexar to his wife.

Mrs. Timberly placed a chair for Bexar, who began to apologize for his intrusion.

"It's no trouble at all," she insisted kindly. "We're not over-burdened with company here, and are glad to have some one drop in now and then that we can talk to."

"I've noticed that women don't enjoy frontierin' like men," Bexar observed, leaning back in the comfortable rocker with a sigh of relief. "I reckon nature did n't cut 'em out fer it."

"There's a bit of philosophy that I wish you'd jot down in one of your note-books, Roger," said Barbara, as she began to prepare for the evening meal. "I've told Roger that a dozen times, Mr. Bexar, yet he insists that I am exceptional."

Bexar smiled wearily.

"It's too lonesome fer 'em. A woman that don't like comp'ny is giner'ly so homely that she wants t' hide when the neighbors come in.

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That's my observation. Tryin' t' git some land by home-steadin'?" he queried, glancing from one to the other, and wondering why such people were vegetating on the plains of Western Kansas. "It's my notion that a man pays double fer every acre he gits in that way. You might make enough money in Paragon to buy the land twice over in the five years you've got t' stay on it, er you might strike a good minin' claim up in the mountains an' be richer'n Croesop in less'n half that time."

His face brightened with eagerness. Barbara saw Roger hitch his chair nearer and look at the stranger with shining eyes.

"I've never been to the mountains," he observed, in a tone that invited further comment.

"No? Well, that's the place fer a live man t' go if he wants t' make his pile an' make it quick. Bad health got me by th' hip er I'd be there now. I've jist missed bein' a millionaire more'n a dozen times, I reckon. I could n't never seem to hold on long enough—that was the trouble. I was in on the ground floor, as y' may say, in Californy Gulch, up at Leadville, in the early days."

He rubbed his fingers nervously through his stubby beard.

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"Me an' Jim Springer was up there, lookin' f'r gold. We never thought o' silver, an' when that heavy black sand that they now call lead carbonates got into our pans an' clogged our riffles, we did n't have no more sense 'n t' damn it f'r a nuisance and throw it away. That sand was cussed nigh pure silver, an' it has made Leadville th' richest silver camp in th' world. 'T was on'y a lack o' good common horse sense th't kep' me frum bein' a Leadville silver king with a bank account longer'n frum hyer to Denver. Jim, he stayed, an' he made it; I come away like a durn fool an' lost my chance."

His voice dropped apathetically.

"And did you never get anything out of it?" was Barbara's sympathetic question.

"Nothin', 'ceptin' a lesson that did n't do me no good," he said, rousing again. "I had a claim out in Utah that looked so mighty promisin' that I built on it big. Ole Tom Bridger uv Provo grubstaked me an' was with me in it. He spent a lot o' money and I put in five years' hard work on that hole in th' ground, not takin' out enough t' pay th' expenses. Then the lode petered an' I quit. A year er so afterward Sol Rosenfield, a Salt Lake Jew, stuck his pick into that tunnel, an' before

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he'd worked ten hours he opened up the lead ag'in. You've heard o' the King David mine? That was it. Rosenfield took eight hundred thousan' dollars out o' the King David an' then sold it fer a half a million more."

The reminiscent flood thus let loose warmed and brightened Bexar until he seemed a changed man. Roger Timberly was quite as eager to listen to Bexar's stories as the latter was to tell them. They fired his quick imagination, and he plied Bexar with questions about lodes and placers, the chances of attaining to sudden wealth in the mountains, the different kinds of mining, and the various methods of reducing ores. To Barbara much of it was jargon.

"I should n't be able to recognize a stamp mill if I were to meet one in the road," she confessed humorously, as she poured Bexar's coffee. "I suppose it has something to do with mining; though for all I know it may be used to stamp dollars or cancel stamps in a post office. Do you take sugar, Mr. Bexar?"

For the first time Bexar opened his lips in a hearty laugh. He took sugar in his coffee, but he took very little else. He was "dead tired" from his long drive, he said, and was afraid he was not very well. Nevertheless, under Roger's questioning he talked until a late hour, and

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was then shown by Roger into the room he was to occupy.

Bexar tossed restlessly during the night, and awoke in the morning with a high fever that somewhat alarmed Barbara. Roger produced some medicines he had ready for emergencies, and Barbara bathed the sick man's head and face, and sought in various ways to make him comfortable.

Bexar seemed so much worse that afternoon and night, that when another morning came Roger was on the point of driving to Paragon for a doctor; but Bexar, who had no money to pay a doctor, roused himself when he learned of this, declared that he was very much better, and begged Roger to abandon the idea. As if to make good his assurance he began to improve almost immediately, and was soon considered by the Timberlys to be out of danger. A week went by, however, before he was able to leave his bed, and nearly another week linked itself to that before he felt strong enough to continue his eastward journey.

During that time the Timberlys learned all he had to tell of himself and his past. He had been within reach of a fortune a score of times. As a prospector he had picked up and now held a number of mining claims, any one of

Barbara

which might turn out worthless or yield fabulously, with the chances much in favor of the former. These mining claims, with the buckboard and the bronchos, were the only things he now possessed in the world ; and his only living relative was a cousin residing in Central Kansas, of whom he told little except that the home of this cousin was his present destination.

After the fever left Bexar, Roger returned to his interrupted writings. He told Bexar that he was an author, and that instead of raising cattle or tilling the soil like his neighbors, he made his living by writing sketches and tales.

This was a very mysterious sort of trade to Bexar, who lay many hours quietly watching Roger as he scratched away at a table. Barbara seemed to be an author, too, for she did about as much writing as Roger ; but when Bexar questioned her she said she was only copying and never did any original work. This was about as much of a muddle to him as his talks of mining matters had been to her, for he had as little idea of the meaning of "original work" as she had of the appearance of a stamp mill.

In studying Barbara, Bexar found himself contrasting her with Roger, very much to the disparagement of the latter, and he was more

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than once vexed to the point of anger by some bit of selfishness displayed by Roger or by some word of sharp reproof.

When it came to looks, Roger was equally at a disadvantage; for though at first sight Bexar had thought them a handsome couple, he came very readily to the conclusion that Barbara possessed most of the good looks as well as most of the goodness. Roger's gray eyes were sunken and weak, his chest flat, his features angular, and his brushy mustache stiff and wiry. Careless of his personal appearance, he lounged about in a faded smoking-jacket and slippers, while Barbara always impressed Bexar as being tidily neat.

"I reckon I'll be strong enough t' go on t'-morrow," he said, dropping into a chair and looking at her. "You've been so tarnation good t' me that 'f I had a forchin I'd be willin' t' give it t' ye, as a sort o' half pay f'r what you've done. I ain't got nothin', though, that's very promisin', 'cept them minin' claims. I'm goin' t' make over t' you th' one that's near Cripple Crick. If any of 'em ever turns out well, that'll be th' one."

"We don't want any pay, Mr. Bexar," Barbara protested.

"Likely I should n't feel as I do if you reely

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wanted pay," said Bexar, rubbing his beard nervously. "It's jist because you don't want anything, an' because sich kindness could n't be paid fer in a thousan' years, that I 'm goin' t' make over that claim t' you. If it turns out well, there'll not be anybody gladder'n me."

It was a purpose from which he could not be turned. When this became clear, Roger suggested that a small sum should be named as a consideration in the articles of transfer, and insisted on paying Bexar at least ten dollars, to help him on his journey. In addition, he advised that, for business reasons, he should be named with Barbara as a grantee.

Bexar looked askance at this proposition. He wanted the claim to be wholly Barbara's. But as Barbara offered no objection he silently submitted, and the claim was given to "Roger Hayes Timberly and Barbara Timberly his wife." Roger drew up the paper, and that there might be no error of legal formality he brought in a notary who lived several miles away to witness Bexar's clumsy signature and affix to the document a notarial seal.

Whether or not Barbara approved of all this Bexar could not tell. Sometimes he fancied she did not. At the outset he thought she

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was going to offer a protest; but if she had such an intention Roger's influence kept her silent.

The next morning Bexar was ready to depart. Barbara stood in the stiff wind by the side of the buckboard, clutching nervously at her sun-bonnet while Bexar and Roger hitched up the bronchos. There was a suspicion of tears in her gray eyes.

"Good-bye!" said Bexar, wringing the hand of each and choking visibly. "May y' never be in need, as I was; but if sich hard luck should ever come t' yeh, may y' find frien's as good. I dunno how t' wish y' anything better. On'y, I hope th't claim 'll make y' rich."

Then he turned the bronchos into the trail and drove swiftly away as if he feared that his heart would fail him. At the farthest rise he twisted about in his seat and waved a hand in farewell; then the buckboard rolled down the slope and he passed from their sight forever.

Somehow, when Barbara went back into the house the rooms seemed to have lost something, and she felt a vague and strange loneliness.

"I declare, Barbara, if you have n't been crying!" said Roger, with some surprise, as

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he came in a few moments later. "Hope you did n't fall in love with the old chap!"

He advanced and kissed her, smoothed back her hair, and took a seat at her side.

"Do you know what I intend to do?" was his question. "I'm going to Cripple Creek. I've been wanting to see the mines and the mountains, you know, and I can kill two birds with one stone, — make a study of the mines and see if that claim is worth anything."

She looked up quickly, a sudden pain at her heart.

"And leave me here?"

"Why not?" he asked gayly. "I'll not be gone a great while. Two weeks at the farthest. Of course I'd be glad to have you go too, if it were possible. But we're pretty short of money, you know."

Until that moment Barbara had not realized how Roger's active imagination had been fired by Bexar's talks. It is true she had observed the eagerness with which he had put his questions, but he had always shown a feverish interest in any subject that promised new material for literary work.

This was not the first time that Roger's thoughtlessness had touched her. She knew

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he did not mean to be cruel, but he was self-centred and self-sufficient. She was beginning to have a feeling that he loved himself and his art more than he did anything else in the world — more than he loved her. She was beginning to see, too, that he was often dominated by his impulses and by a love of change, and this, notwithstanding the fact that he was a hard worker and a hard student.

When, shortly after their marriage, they had moved to these semi-arid plains and homesteaded a land claim, the impelling motive had been Roger's inherent unrest, coupled with a romantic longing for the freedom of the wide frontier, quite as much as it had been the advice of the physician who had solemnly thumped his lungs and told him that he needed a dryer climate and that Indiana was not good for him. As to how the change might affect Barbara or be regarded by her, that had been a consideration wholly secondary. At the time, a momentary harboring of such a thought would have seemed rankest treason to Barbara. Even now it was an undefined feeling rather than knowledge.

Roger softly patted her tanned cheeks, which not even the trying winds of Western Kansas could rob of their beauty, and begged her to

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be a woman and to look at the matter in a sensible light. He did not know how much he was asking of her. If his finances had justified, he would have been glad to take her into the mountains with him, and would have enjoyed with her the new scenes and the novel experiences thus to be gained.

He had thought the matter out, and had reached the conclusion that he could not afford it. He purposed to economize personally in every way and literally to rough it, accepting hardships and close living as necessities. This was something which Barbara could not be expected to do.

He explained all this as he talked, setting aside one objection after another, until there was nothing left on which she could hang a protest, except the loneliness of the claim life and the depression she felt at the thought of their separation.

"It isn't as if I was to be gone a long time," he urged. "I don't doubt I can be back in a couple of weeks easily, but we'll say ten days for the outside limit, instead of two weeks. I'll promise to be gone not longer than ten days, no matter what happens, for I'll be quite as anxious to get home as you will be to have me back. We'll arrange to have one of the

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Tilford girls come over and stay with you of nights, and you 'll not be half as lonesome as you think."

What could she say further? Roger was resolved to go, and all the arguments she could heap up would have been powerless to hold him. So she made the best of it; and that afternoon she drove with him over to Tilford's, their nearest neighbor, three miles away, to see about getting one of the girls to stay with her.

Roger was in a very happy and hopeful mood that evening. Together they packed his valise for the journey, and he gave her out of his purse the small amount of money he thought she would need during his absence, putting the rest away in his pocket.

Barbara drove Roger to town the next morning, and, cheered by his high spirits, she became almost joyous. She liked to handle the reins, and was never so contented as when spinning over the level prairie trail, with the rattling buggy wheels and the tattoo of pony hoofs making merry music. The day was almost perfect. For once the winds had forgotten to blow. The heavens were an azure dome. It was long before the details of that morning drive to Paragon faded from Barbara's memory.

They had started somewhat late, and the

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Denver-bound train on the Santa Fé was due as they rolled into the wide sandy street leading to the station and along which all the business houses and restaurants were ranged. They had no intimate acquaintances in the town, and there had never been anything in its rawness and newness to win Barbara's regard. The boastful self-assertiveness of the name, which she believed indicated a characteristic quality of many of its principal citizens, impressed her unpleasantly.

Roger assisted her to alight; and when he had tied the ponies to a hitching rack and had taken his valise out of the buggy they walked together into the station. The arrivals and departures of trains were numbered with Paragon's most interesting events, and a crowd of people now thronged the platform waiting to see the west-bound come in. Among these was a groceryman of whom Roger had made frequent purchases, who, observing Roger and Barbara standing apart from the others with the valise at their feet, bustled forward and spoke a few words to them.

The train had already whistled and was in sight; a few moments later it bore down on the station, rushing and roaring in a cloud of dust, and came to a wheezing stop.

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“Be a good girl and don’t cry!” Roger urged, kissing Barbara and picking up his valise. “Remember I’ll be back in ten days sure, and sooner if I can.”

The train made but a brief stop and the bell was already clanging.

“Good-bye!” she whispered, making a brave effort to hide her tears as he hurried to the steps of the nearest coach.

He stood on the platform to wave her a final adieu; and she saw him standing thus until the train turned the bend and was lost to sight behind a projection of the sand hills.

CHAPTER II

WAITING

NOW that Roger was actually gone, Barbara tried to bring to her support all of her mental courage, and because of her natural cheerfulness she succeeded in banishing temporarily her sense of deep depression. She returned to the buggy, fed the ponies some shelled oats which were in a bag under the seat, then sought a restaurant, feeling that she needed physical as well as mental strength.

Nevertheless, the long drive home was wearisome and depressing. The sun had grown bright and hot, and a wind which had risen in the northwest, and which she had to face, so increased in strength as she drove on that she lowered the buggy top to take the strain off the ponies, and sat in the sun, unshaded by so much as an umbrella. The settlers' houses were few and far between, and the only person she passed was the star route mail carrier jogging along in his cart with the mail bags from Plains City.

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The nimble-footed ponies covered the distance with great rapidity, making the buggy wheels sing in a way that was very exhilarating. As Barbara drew near home, her thoughts were still with Roger, whom she now pictured as speeding over the plains of Eastern Colorado. The sight of the house brought memories of Bexar also. But for Bexar, whom she had pitied and whom she had come to like so much, Roger would now be at home with her instead of hurrying to the wild scenes of the mountains. Yet she could but think kindly of Bexar.

"If there should be anything in that claim, we will be very generous with Bexar," was her thought.

Then she began to dream roseate dreams, all of which it seemed to her might come true if the claim should prove to be of value. For one thing, that would probably induce Roger to leave forever this lonesome life of the plains and throw himself into scenes of business activity, where there were people to be met and known and something of life to be seen and lived, even if it were new and crude.

As Barbara pictured this other life to herself, there came back to her their talks and their plans when the dream of this home on the plains had not yet become a reality. She

Barbara

recalled, as if it were but yesterday, her first sight of this "claim" in this new land. She and Roger had driven out to it from Paragon in a prairie schooner. The hood of the schooner had been pushed back for purposes of sight-seeing, and she and Roger had sat together, happy as children, on the high spring seat. She could hear him talking again in his old enthusiastic way, and she could remember just how the land had looked when neither house, stable, corral, nor fence had yet appeared on it.

Something like a smile of contentment and pleasure came to Barbara's thoughtful face as these recollections crowded in upon her. She seemed to see again the soft emerald tint of spring that had been so noticeable in the gray and dun of the buffalo and gramma grasses. A red-winged blackbird, tipping and tilting on a tall weed, had sung as if his little heart were bursting with the pure joy of existence — sung them a welcome to their new home! The winds had been soft that day, the sky a deep and unfathomable blue, and the whole universe odorous of springing flowers.

"And we have been very, very happy here," she said to herself; "very happy, in spite of the loneliness; and if Roger has ever seemed

Waiting

selfish or a bit cross at times, it was because his work is so trying and makes him so nervous. I'm not sure but I should be glad to have him go into something else, if for no other reason than that — literary work is so wearing !”

In spite of the speed of the untiring Western ponies the time was mid-afternoon when Barbara reached home. Everything looked so abandoned and desolate, now that Roger was gone, that she had a hard fight to keep up her spirits. To assist herself in this she occupied her time with housework, with the ponies, with the cow and the chickens, and with some copying which Roger had left for her to do.

Everything that she did, everything that she saw, everything that she touched, made her think of Roger. She remembered how he had built the little stable ; and how, now and then, just to please herself and to be in his company, she had held up some boards while he nailed them into place. The stable was a flimsy little structure, clumsily put together, but it was Roger's work and hers, even to the laying up of the tiers of heavy sod walls.

The house was much better — the best to be seen within a dozen miles, though it would have seemed mean and poor anywhere else. It had been erected by a carpenter from Para-

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gon, and contained the only brick chimney thereabout. Though there were but three little rooms, they were ample for all their needs, and both within and without, the house was palatial compared with those of other settlers, whose homes were either rude dugouts or structures of sod and rough boards. And this had been their home — her home and Roger's!

She had come with Roger to that home from a happy girlhood, which had held but one shadow, so far as she could remember, and that was the death of her mother, which had left her without a relative in the world. But even then she had Roger's love to cheer and comfort her — Roger who had been her schoolmate, and then her lover, and was now her husband.

She took pride in the fact that both were of good stock. In her own veins flowed the blood of early English cavaliers who had crowded into the colony of Virginia, many of them having, in addition to their titles and their stainless names, nothing but their good swords and their brave hearts. Though Roger was born also in Indiana, he was of old Dutch descent, his ancestors having been among the first settlers of New York. She had joked him sometimes, when he was in a pleasant mood, about their

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high origin, and their present humble position as "claim holders" in the wild West ; but Roger did not take a joke easily, and had usually insisted that they were doing now what their illustrious progenitors had done in times gone by, — a thing considered so noble and even glorious as we look back on it, but which when crystallized into actual fact in the actual present is too often thought to be ignoble and unworthy of a man of ambition and refinement.

The wind lulled at the approach of sunset. Barbara walked out to the little chicken-coops of sod which she and Roger had fashioned, and to which the clucking mothers were now gathering their downy broods, and while the chickens pecked at the wet meal which she threw to them she feasted her eyes and imagination on the glory of the western sky where the sun was sinking.

"Such color!" was her thought. "Gold and crimson, silver, sapphire and vermillion, and I don't know what else. I'm sure I never beheld such sunsets as are to be seen on these plains of Kansas. The sky is fairly on fire. This is a beautiful country, and I don't wonder that Roger likes it, and I'm a silly and selfish girl to ever make him unhappy by any expression of dissatisfaction."

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Slowly the glowing colors faded out of the sky. Out in the West somewhere, where the gold had shone like a brilliant shield, was Roger; and out there, too, was that wonderful claim of Bexar's, which might make them rich, might bring them gold as bright as that which had gleamed in the sky. The promise seemed at the moment so real, and so beautiful was the sunset into which she fancied Roger to be speeding, that the dying of the colors saddened her.

Shortly after sunset one of Tilford's little boys appeared, riding on a saddleless pony, and announced that his sister was ill and could not come over to stay with Barbara that night. At the same time he brought an invitation for her to spend the night at their house, "if she felt afraid."

There was something in the boy's tone which brought back to Barbara an unpleasant recollection of some of the laughter which Roger had indulged in over her timidity. Was she afraid to stay alone? As a rule, the women of the plains, such of them as she had met, were not afraid; staying at home many lonely nights, while their husbands were away freighting or plowing distant "timber claims" to obtain a little needed money. Barbara recalled

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this fact, and decided that she could be as courageous, and so sent word to the Tilfords that she was not afraid to stay alone.

When the boy was gone Barbara took Roger's shotgun out of its corner and picked from his cartridge box some loaded shells. She selected two that were marked "B" on the wads, knowing that these were loaded with buckshot and were intended for antelope hunting. These she put into the gun, which Roger had shown her how to manipulate, but drew them out and substituted charges of bird shot when she reflected that these would be as effective in scaring away intruders and that it would be a dreadful thing to kill any one even unintentionally.

The Northern Cheyennes, held against their will in the western part of the Indian Territory, had but a few years before broken from their reservation and made a desperate attempt to reach their old homes and hunting-grounds in Dakota. They had marked their trail across the Sunflower State in fire and blood, and had carried into temporary captivity the two small daughters of a lonely claim-holder, after murdering the other members of the family.

The recollection of this true story, which she had heard from the Tilfords, came to Bar-

Barbara

bara now, and made her so nervous that, feeling she could not sleep, she sat up until a late hour, reading, with the light burning brightly ; then at last, with the shotgun in reach of her hand and Roger's photograph under her pillow, she sobbed herself to sleep, feeling all the while that she was very weak and foolish.

So bright was the world the next morning, however, that she arose with the brave determination to think of nothing but Roger's return and of the pleasure which that would give her. In spite of this and of the work with which she busied herself constantly, the time passed but slowly.

Three days went by before the mail carrier, who passed within a mile of the house, brought anything from Roger. It was only a postal, written at Pueblo the first day of his journey. Two more days dragged by ; then there came a letter bearing the Cripple Creek post-mark, which informed her of Roger's arrival in that booming mining camp.

Here Roger's communications ceased. Daily Barbara watched with straining eyes for the coming of the mail carrier, and when he appeared in sight she walked out to the trail to meet him, hoping for a letter. The mail brought her nothing but some papers.

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When five more days had passed, bringing the tenth after Roger's departure, and no further word had come from him, Barbara hitched up the ponies and drove to Paragon. She felt that through some error or misunderstanding the letters might have been withheld. Besides, this was the day on which Roger had promised to return.

When she visited the post office she found that there had been no error. No letters had come for her from Roger, though she was given one that would have made his heart glad, for it was from a publisher, and contained a check for a hundred dollars for some short stories.

Barbara stood on the railway platform with the crowd when the Western mail rolled up to the station ; and when Roger did not alight, a sickening, sinking sense of impending ill took possession of her. Though she had written every day, she now wrote him another letter and mailed it. Then, overcome by the wildness of her anxiety, she sent a questioning telegram to the marshal of Cripple Creek. The reply came in due time :

"R. H. Timberly registered at Placer Hotel and left grip."

This was so unsatisfactory that Barbara wired again ; but, though she waited till a late

Barbara

hour, she received no answer. It was dark before she reached home. The picketed cow was lowing for water, and the chickens had gone into their coops and climbed to their perches without their usual feed. Barbara was so low-spirited that her little home looked desolate and lonely.

The next day the mail carrier brought a telegram from the Cripple Creek marshal. It had come after her departure from Paragon, and had been sent to the post office, as she had no town address. It brought the information that Roger had not been seen for several days, and his whereabouts were unknown to the people of the Placer Hotel. Barbara's determination was taken instantly. She would go to Cripple Creek herself and learn what terrible mishap had befallen Roger.

Preparatory to this she hitched up the ponies and drove across the three miles of intervening trailless buffalo-grass sward to Tilford's.

Tilford was putting in some late corn with a sod planter as Barbara reined in at the side of the plowed space, which, though it was of considerable size, looked like a narrow brown ribbon in the midst of those leagues of grass. He stopped in his work and walked toward

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the buggy, rightly divining that she wished to speak with him. His swart face was bearded, and puckered with wrinkles that radiated fan-like from the corners of his eyes. He bore the sod planter in his gnarled hands and bowed his shoulders as he hobbled over the newly turned sod.

"Mornin'! mornin'!" he said, his ancient face beaming. "Fine weather we're havin', but a bit dryish. If the wind would on'y swing into the south fer a few days and blow good and hard it'd bring rain, but it hangs to the north'ards, an' that's a bad sign."

Barbara smiled back into his withered honest face in spite of her thoughts of Roger.

"You seem to be putting in a good big crop, Mr. Tilford," she observed, trying to take an interest in the things that so interested the old man. "I came to —"

"If I was younger!" Tilford cut in. "'Tain't nothin' to what I used to put in back in Eastern Kansas. They hain't but twenty acres of this, and back there I've had in more'n two hundred acres, to say nothin' of other stuff. But I ain't got no help now but my boys, an' boys ain't the workers they was when I was young. Them ponies o' yourn air too light to do much plowin', I

Barbara

reckon? I allus think it's best t' git a leetle heavier horse; he kin go nighabout as fast as ponies, an' you kin do heavier work with him."

"Yes; I suppose you're right, Mr. Tilford," she said, unable to hide her nervousness. "I came over to ask some favors of you. I have n't heard a word from Roger for almost a week now, and he promised to write to me every day. He promised, too, that he would return yesterday. I drove to town to meet him and to see if there were any letters from him. He didn't come, and there were no letters. Then I telegraphed to the Cripple Creek marshal, and could learn nothing of him."

Tilford, leaning on the sod planter, was looking earnestly at her. A smile broke over his puckered features.

"'Tain't nothin' t' worry about, Mrs. Timberly," he urged. "That's a big country out there and the days hike by mighty fast when a man is seein' new sights. He's been busy, I reckon; an' he'll be back all right."

He took out a battered silver watch and consulted it.

"May come on the evenin' train! Jist you

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let up worryin', Mrs. Timberly. Likely he'll come drivin' home this evenin'."

Barbara could not be convinced so easily.

"I wish I could think so," she said, "but you see I know Roger better than you do. He would have written, if something had not occurred to keep him from it. I know that he is in trouble of some kind — perhaps sick, or lost his way in the hills."

Tilford shook his head in disbelief.

"He'll be drivin' home to-night or to-morrer."

"I wish I could think so, but I can't, Mr. Tilford; so I'm going to Cripple Creek myself. And that's why I drove over — to see if you would look after our livestock while I'm away: I hope I won't have to be gone long."

"I can't believe that anything has happened to him," Tilford insisted; "but o' course we'll look after your things. We kin bring 'em over here fer that matter and keep 'em fer ye. But I reckon you'd better talk to maw about it — 'bout your goin', I mean; she'll think jist as I do."

This was what Barbara desired — to have a talk with Mrs. Tilford. She turned the ponies aside from the plowing, cramping the buggy

Barbara

back so that the old man could get in by her side.

"No, thankee, I'll walk; 't ain't fur."

Then he dropped the sod planter to the ground and set off across the plowed strip, shuffling along with his shoulders bent and his arms swinging, while Barbara drove on round to the house.

It was a typical "claim" house of the Western plains, half dugout and half boards, and was set in the southern slope of a low hill, that in a hilly country would not have been considered a hill at all, but which on those plane-like levels seemed to be an elevation of considerable prominence.

Mrs. Tilford noted the approaching buggy, at the same time sighting her husband, who had worked out of the plowed ground and was now walking quickly along over the crisp, short grass. She came to the door, puffy and rotund, like some huge animal rising out of its underground lair, and stood curiously in the doorway, wiping her hands on her gingham apron.

Mrs. Tilford was one of the women of the plains who was "not afraid." At the side of the doorway, leaning against the low board wall, was a stout club or cudgel, her inseparable

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companion whenever she had occasion to walk abroad. This club was her rattlesnake killer, for the grass of the plains abounded in rattlesnakes, and her fearless prowess in the work of exterminating these pests was shown by the big gourd in the house filled with rattles that she had cut from the tails of snakes she had slain. Mrs. Tilford knew how to load a rifle and to shoot with the marksman-like accuracy of the true plainsman. She knew how to plow, and could turn a better furrow than even Tilford himself. The huge stack of prairie hay out behind the sod stable was chiefly the work of her own hands, she having driven the clicking mowing machine day after day in the hot sun up and down through the tall slough grass that grew abundantly in one of the little valleys. In addition to all this, she was a neat housekeeper, and, taking into consideration what she had to do with, an excellent cook.

Mrs. Tilford recognized Barbara and came out to greet her, still wiping her damp, red hands on the gingham apron. Her round, puffy face, browned like leather, bore a welcoming look.

"I'll have one o' the boys put away the ponies," she said, catching hold of the nearest bridle for the purpose of keeping the ponies steady while Barbara dismounted.

Barbara

"No, I have n't time to stay now," said Barbara, still clutching the reins in her slender ungloved hands. "I may want to come over and remain with you to-night, though."

"I 've been thinkin' that mebby you was gittin' a mite lonesome over there by yourself," vouched Mrs. Tilford. "I told Mr. Tilford only yisterday that I reckoned we'd better send one of the girls over to set with you a bit of daytimes; but we've had so much to do, and the girls has been so busy. It's a lot of work, Mrs. Timberly, to git things to goin' in a new home."

Tilford had come up and stood with his hands planted on his hips, his big hat flapping back from his face in the breeze.

"She says 't she's goin' to Cripple Crick," he explained. "It's a fool notion, I think, but she's set on it. Of course we'll look after her stuff, if she must go; but my 'pinion is that her husband 'll be along d'reckly. Some bizness er other is keepin' him. That's what I said to her, maw; but she won't believe it."

Barbara had to retell her story, and re-expressed her determination of going to the mountains, Mrs. Tilford listening eagerly but undisturbed. She agreed with her husband that it was "a foolish piece o' work;" but,

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when Barbara could not be dissuaded, both Mr. and Mrs. Tilford promised to attend faithfully to the needs of the Timberly livestock.

“And come over an’ stay with us to-night,” Mrs. Tilford begged. “Mebby you ’ll think better of it by mornin’, and mebbby your man will be home by that time, and you won’t think that you haf’ to go.”

Barbara thanked them and drove homeward, moaning over and over to herself:

“Oh, Roger! Roger! What has become of you? what has become of you?”

CHAPTER III

IN THE GOLD CAMP OF THE ROCKIES

BARBARA returned to Tilford's that evening and spent a wretched night in the stuffy, crowded quarters of the settler's humble home. Mrs. Tilford was kind, and exerted herself in cooking, preparing many things, insisting that if Barbara would only eat she would feel better. According to Mrs. Tilford's philosophy, the ability to devour pies and huge dishes of gingerbread was the thermometer which registered the high degrees of cheerfulness.

The next morning Tilford put his own thin work horses to his rattle-trap spring wagon, saying that as he had to go to town himself to get some coal he would take Barbara in. Barbara recognized under this a certain rude sense of delicacy which made him wish to save her from the feeling of obligation; so, though she would have preferred to make the journey behind her own quick-stepping ponies, she thanked him and assured him that he was very

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kind and that she could never forget the goodness of himself and his wife to her.

As they prepared to drive away, Mrs. Tilford stood in the low doorway, that seemed so like the mouth of a cave, and repeated her injunctions to her two boys, who were on the point of setting out for the Timberly homestead, to "Look well after them things, mind ye!" meaning the Timberly livestock. Then she kissed Barbara in a motherly way, wiped a tear from her leather-colored cheek with her big, red hand, and stood waving a towel in adieu until they were well out of sight.

The morning was as perfect as the one on which Roger had gone away. They started earlier, however, for Tilford's thin horses were much slower than the ponies; and, as Barbara soon discovered, the stiff-backed wagon seat was not so comfortable as the seat of her own springy buggy.

Tilford talked incessantly as he drove on, possibly for the purpose of distracting Barbara from the unpleasant thoughts that had so taken possession of her. In spite of herself she became interested, as he told of the early days in Eastern Kansas, when the Missouri "Border Ruffians" harried the wild frontier. He had seen and talked with old John Brown

Barbara

—“Ossawatomie Brown;” he had fought with the Free-Soilers against Quantrell’s guerillas; he had witnessed the sacking and burning of Lawrence; and knew John Speer, the anti-slavery editor, who had a son killed in the Lawrence massacre and whose printing-press and type were thrown into the Kaw River, where they probably rest to this day.

“Them was great days,” he said, as he flicked his whiplash at one of the agile sand lizards that seemed always on the point of being crushed by the wagon wheels yet always escaped by the narrowest margin. “Me and Jim Lane — you’ve heard of him? — swum the Kaw together onc’t t’ git away frum Quantrell’s men. There was a feller c’d make a speech fer ye! Most wonderful speaker I ever heerd, was Jim Lane. Onc’t when they accused him of killin’ a man that tried to jump his claim, — an’ I reckon he killed him, — Jim stood up on a dry-goods box in the streets o’ Lawrence and made sich a speech about Free Soil and slammed it at the Mizzouri men so heavy that instid of ’restin’ him the people was soon pack-in’ him round on their shoulders.”

Tilford sighed reflectively and bit off a chew of tobacco.

“Too bad about Jim! He killed himself

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—shot himself through the head, after he'd been to Congress, too! You can't never tell what a man's comin' to till after he's planted."

For almost five minutes he drove on without saying a word, clucking now and then at his horses and noisily snapping his whiplash.

"And that's a fact!" he continued abruptly. "I had a thousand acres of land in the Kaw valley, no gumbo on it nor nothin', but good black soil, and now I hain't got a thing but that claim back there. I went on some notes fer my neighbors. I had to pay the notes myself, in the end, and that tuck my land."

Barbara was moved to express her commiseration.

"Yes, it was purty tough; but as long as there's life there's hope, I says to maw; and she agreed with me, and we come out here to try it over ag'in. There's a woman fer you! No whinin' or snivelin' about maw, there ain't. She might have made it hard fer me, too, when we lost the land, but she did n't."

Again he was silent; then roused himself, as if determined to turn from these thoughts.

"See that off there?" he said, straightening up and pointing with his whip. "They don't have any of them back East, they tell me, and

Barbara

not often in Eastern Kansas, though I used to see 'em some before the country was so cut up and settled."

There had been no haze that bright morning, and now on every hand were to be seen blue, lake-like illusions. Barbara had already been watching them, thinking, as usual, of Roger, who had delighted in studying the mirages of the plains.

A blue line, resembling a narrow thread, visible on their right, was expanding as they advanced, growing wider and wider, until it resembled a broad stream.

"It's very beautiful," said Barbara.

"Purty hain't no name for it," Tilford declared. "You'll see it grow bigger d'reckly."

It continued to widen and expand, and soon the entire stretch of grassy sea had changed into a crystalline lake, from which extended other bodies like bays and rivers.

"I've heerd of men bein' fooled by them things," Tilford observed; "heerd of men believin' that they was real water, and follerin' 'um and follerin' 'um, hopin' to git a drink, until they fell down and died of thirst. Good many stories ye hear ain't so, though, and I've my doubts about them. I don't reckon a reel sens'ble man'd git fooled so easy."

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"But it looks very much like water," said Barbara. "If one did n't know! It seems to me I can see the reflections of trees on the other bank."

"Jist weeds," said Tilford. "Looks like little trees, though. They're drawed up like and made to seem bigger, but if you'll look clos't you kin see that they're weeds. I've seen cattle and houses pictured that way, upside down in that water, which ain't water. Did n't look like houses ner cattle, though; ner like anything else I ever seen on this earth. I got a paper one time with a whole lot o' queer pictures in it. I reckon the man that made 'em was crazy. Well, they looked like them pictures."

Thus Tilford beguiled the way to town, spicing the talk with his quaint observations, until at times Barbara almost forgot the serious nature of her errand.

On their arrival in Paragon she hastened with eager feet to the post office and the telegraph office, meeting with disappointment at each; then, sure that something terrible had befallen Roger, she went with his publisher's check to the local bank, where she was known, and after some persuasion she induced the cashier to give her bills for the check, signing

Barbara

Roger's name and her own beneath it on the back of the check.

Tilford came down to the station and waited there with her after she had purchased her ticket, until the train from the East came in.

"You 'll be comin' back to-morrer er next day, all right, and with your man with ye."

"I hope so," she said, as he clumsily tried to assist her to the platform of the coach. "Good-bye, Mr. Tilford; you've been very kind to me, both you and your wife."

"Good-bye," he called, lifting his dust-stained slouchy hat as the train started. "We'll look after your things all right; so ye need n't worry."

Having found a seat in the day coach, Barbara had little now to distract her thoughts from Roger, and as a consequence her eagerness and anxiety increased greatly. Though she sat at a window, turning from the passengers to the scenery, she saw little of the dull landscape, which was brightened now and then by the vivid green of alfalfa fields or broken by ridges of sand-hills. The sight of the natural groves of scraggy cottonwoods along the Upper Arkansas pleased her, after the treeless monotony of the plains. There were some shade trees in Paragon, but they were young and small.

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After passing into Colorado she heard some of the passengers talking of "towers and turrets," and off on the right she beheld, in the miragy air, what she at first took to be another illusion of the mirage. Broken walls there were, with houses and small towers, which the deceptive atmosphere exaggerated and contorted strangely. Voiceless and tenantless, a record of the days of terror and Indian raiders, they were the crumbling remains of old Fort Lyon.

These passed, Barbara returned to her thoughts of Roger. At Pueblo she roused herself and looked with some interest at the smelters, for from this point Roger had sent the postal. His postal and letter, the last things from his hands, rested now close against her heart, along with his photograph.

Barbara had never seen the mountains toward which she was speeding; and the blue line on the horizon, pointed out now as the Greenhorn Range, as it grew higher and higher against the western sky, gave play to her imagination and distraction to her painful thoughts.

From Pueblo they ran toward Denver, and, when evening drew on, they came finally abreast of the massive and rugged front of Cheyenne Mountain, with Pike's Peak behind

Barbara

it, tiptoeing and shouldering his fellows, but almost invisible. How her heart fluttered! Somewhere in the mysterious regions back of that giant she knew lay the gold camp of Cripple Creek.

Then she found herself in Colorado Springs, and left the train there. Darkness was about her now, and she could not see much of the brisk little city that had apparently camped for the night out on the plains at the base of the great mountains.

Going into the ticket office, she was informed that the Cripple Creek stage running from Divide would not start until nine o'clock the next day, and that passengers for it would be taken up on the Colorado Midland train in the morning. This was a disappointment, for she wanted to go on that night.

Helpless to do anything more, she sent another telegram to the Cripple Creek marshal, and one addressed to Roger; then sought a hotel and rest. The answer from the marshal came that night, reiterating his statement that Roger's whereabouts were unknown; the other telegram brought no reply.

Barbara was in such feverish haste to go on that she arrived at the depot a full half-hour before the train was ready to start. It rolled

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away at last, bearing her past the Garden of the Gods, with its fantastic rock forms ; past little Manitou, resting like a gem at the base of Pike's Peak ; through many tunnels and by Pike's Peak itself, and on and up, between cliffs and through little cañons, with many a curve and turn and by many a laughing waterfall, until the tiny station of Divide was reached, where the stage for Cripple Creek awaited the coming of the train.

Barbara had never ridden in such a vehicle, nor seen anything like it. By much contriving she managed to stow herself away inside, packed in with a motley group of men, all of whom were laughing and talking and seemed to be in high spirits. There was no other woman in the coach.

The stage had been used on the Deadwood trail, she heard one of the men say, and with a certain pang of misgiving she thought of the money she had in her purse and of her precious travelling-bag, which had been tossed into the boot by the driver as if it were of no more consequence than a stick of wood.

One of the men took out a cigar, but put it back in his pocket without lighting it when he noticed the evident refinement and beauty of Barbara's face. Nearly all of the passengers,

Barbara

as she soon discovered, were either from Colorado Springs or Denver, and were financially interested in Cripple Creek or its mines. There was much talk of the "Pharmacist," a mining property that was being developed by some druggists, and she heard of the "Great Anaconda," and the "Holy Moses," and of a score of other mines and claims. The only thought of these men apparently was mines and mining, of quick affluence, of marvellous "strikes" of ore, of strange "placers" on the tops of hills, when every one knows that since the days of the California Argonauts "placers" are only to be looked for in the beds of creeks and rivers.

The stage rolled on at a rapid pace, up and down hill, over smooth country and rough, with a change of horses now and then; and then on and on, by the margin of a trout stream that came plunging and tearing down from the mountains, through forests of aspens and mountain poplars and thick growths of spruce and pine, all of which were entrancingly beautiful to Barbara, wearied as she was of the flat, untimbered plains.

The mountains were a source of delight to her. Off at the left she caught a glimpse now and then of Pike's Peak, with his snow-white

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cap and a great ruffle of fleecy clouds about his neck. There were smaller peaks everywhere and hills innumerable. A smouldering forest fire still burned on some high slopes, and they passed miles of blackened forest waste, strewn with burned trees and gaunt black stumps, where the fire had rioted. In spite of it all and in the midst of it all, Barbara's thought was ever of Roger.

They were approaching Cripple Creek, she at last heard the men say, and again her pulses quickened. The ride had been long and wearing, notwithstanding the wild beauty of the scenery through which the bouncing old stage-coach had passed. A rough cabin in the woods was now and then seen, with here and there a mound of yellow clay that made her think of a newly made grave. These yellow mounds increased in number as the coach drew nearer the great mining camp. They spotted the hill-sides in every direction. Men who resembled the clay-colored laborers she had seen digging in the streets of cities were to be seen amid the trees and out on the bare hills, engaged feverishly in throwing up more of these mounds, as if they fancied there were not already enough; toiling away, too, as though the work must all be completed before nightfall.

Barbara

The mounds marked "prospect holes," Barbara heard one of the passengers remark, and the toiling men were "miners" and "prospectors" who were hoping to "find color;" by which she guessed, rather than knew, that all of those clayed figures, wielding pick and spade, were simply other Bexars chasing the gleam of gold over those wild hills.

"If Mr. Bexar's claim is but one of those, I don't believe our chances of getting rich are very good; there are so many of them!" was her thought.

It was past noon when the stage-coach rolled into the famous gold camp of the Rockies, which straggled down Squaw Gulch in all the newness and rawness of fresh paint and no paint, with houses and "shacks," tents and lean-tos of every description imaginable, as if the crazy dream of an insane architect had been crystallized suddenly into realization.

Barbara caught her breath as she descended with cramped limbs from the coach and looked about. This restless hive, with its swarm of hurrying humanity and its Babel of sound, was Cripple Creek. Roger had been here. Where was he now?

Her first step was to inquire her way to the Placer Hotel, which she found a decent hos-

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telry. Behind the desk in the office inside was a portly woman who was looking over the register and checking some figures on a slip of paper. She looked up as Barbara entered.

"If you please," said Barbara, advancing with her travelling-bag, "I am Mrs. Timberly, from Paragon, Kansas. My husband stopped here some days ago."

Her voice trembled in spite of herself.

Mrs. Gibbs, the landlady, for it was she who was checking the figures, gave the tired stranger a kindly and sympathetic smile.

"Yes, I remember," she answered. "The marshal came up here two or three times to ask about him. You wired him, I think?"

"Yes," said Barbara, the color coming and going in her tanned cheeks.

Mrs. Gibbs turned the pages of the register slowly and found a signature in the handwriting that Barbara knew so well:

"R. H. Timberly, Paragon, Kansas."

There was a date beside the name, made when Roger first set foot in Cripple Creek. The record showed, too, that Roger had paid his bill, and Mrs. Gibbs remembered that he had asked her to keep his valise until he called or sent for it. But that had been more than a week before.

Barbara

"I have n't seen or heard of him since," said the landlady. "He may be in some other hotel, though I should think if he is he would send for his grip. It's here yet. Perhaps you could get the marshal to find out if he registered at any other place."

At Barbara's request Mrs. Gibbs sent for the marshal. He came soon, a big-girthed, brown-whiskered, keen-eyed man, who looked with quickened interest at the young woman in the gray travelling-dress, whose beauty was so marked and whose questions were so unanswerable.

"Your husband is n't at any of the hotels," he said, with the firmness of conviction. "I made inquiries when I got your first telegram. He might be stopping with some acquaintances, or something."

The pain in Barbara's face touched him.

"There must be many wicked men here," she said. "He had a little money with him. He may have been robbed — killed. Something has happened to him, or he would have written to me."

The marshal was a man of experience, and a strange light came into his clear, keen eyes.

"Been nobody hurt lately, excepting them two Scotchmen that got blowed up with dyna-

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mite t' other day over at the Little Boss," he said, temporizing. "I keep a pretty good grip on the doings of this camp, ma'am, and if anything of the kind had occurred I'd have heard about it. It's my opinion that your husband is n't in Cripple Creek."

He did not want to tell Barbara that he believed her husband had deserted her, but she read this opinion in his face and forced its acknowledgment.

"No; he has n't deserted me," she declared, with hot cheeks, pained that any one should harbor such a thought for an instant. "You do not know Roger. Something terrible has happened to him; he is sick or hurt somewhere, or," she faltered, "dead. He would never leave me in that way, without a word."

The marshal confessed that he was no doubt in error, promised to set on foot an inquiry, and departed.

During the interval of waiting for the marshal's arrival, Barbara had examined Roger's valise, clutching it nervously and eagerly when Mrs. Gibbs gave it to her and feeling that perhaps it held something which would assist in clearing away the mystery. It contained only some soiled linen; everything else had been taken out of it. Even though Mrs.

Barbara

Gibbs was present, Barbara had wept over it as she put the contents again in place; and now that the marshal was gone and she began to feel that whatever was done she must do alone, she begged the landlady to assign her the room Roger had taken, and she was soon shown up to it.

It was probably the first and last room Roger had occupied in the camp; and the very furniture, the dumb walls and chairs, took on something of sacredness in Barbara's eyes.

When she had put the valise away, she resolved to put her tears away with it and begin the search to which she was determined to dedicate all of her energies. Tears were weakening, and she needed to be strong, she told herself—oh, so strong! for Roger's sake. With this resolve in mind, she somewhat astonished Mrs. Gibbs by descending to the dining-room and eating a hearty meal.

This sensible action so strengthened her that, when she walked out into the crooked streets, having on a slip of paper the addresses of certain business and mining firms that she purposed to interview, a modicum of hope came to uphold her and make her brave. The air was crisp and exhilarating, and the bright sunlight on the white, far peaks of the Sangre

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de Christo and Collegiate ranges seemed to smile like heaven's own benediction.

But the hope died as the hours wore on ; and, when darkness descended and the camp lights began to wink and shine, exhausted in body and mind and with a crushing weight at her heart, Barbara crept back along the streets, where music and loud laughter arose from the drinking resorts and dance halls that everywhere brazenly opened wide their doors.

Up on a high slope a brass band brayed in front of a gospel tent. There a number of people were gathering. Outside the tent a minister in a high collar and long frock-coat was earnestly inviting the passers to enter as Barbara hurried by ; but she shrank from him and from the crowd, gave the place but a glance, and fled on for the shelter of the Placer Hotel.

Mrs. Gibbs had thoughtfully put aside something for her and kept the tea warm, for the suppers of the Placer Hotel were served early. She sat by the table sympathetically while Barbara tried to eat and to retain a show of courage in spite of her misery.

Mrs. Gibbs had a warm heart ; and, being a woman, knew that a woman in trouble must have some one to whom she can pour out her

Barbara

overflowing grief and thus keep the burden of its weight from crushing her utterly. So she asked questions, when the narrative flagged, and brought in exclamations at the proper places, until, broken by the contagion of Barbara's sore trouble, she, too, sobbed aloud and let the big tears flow unhindered down her cheeks.

"And there didn't seem to be a clue to him at all, anywhere you could go!"

"Nothing," said Barbara, dulled with hopelessness. "I couldn't find a man that had ever seen or heard of him. I showed his picture in all the mining offices, but it did no good. Strangers are coming and going all the time, you know."

She brought out the photograph and gave it to Mrs. Gibbs for examination; and cried a little when she took it again and set it temporarily on the table, for the eyes seemed to follow her with a hungry look.

"But I'll find him!" she asserted, striving to pull her courage together. "He is somewhere, alive or dead; and I will find him. I must find him!"

CHAPTER IV

THE AUTOCRAT OF THE "DAILY CLIPPER"

TIRED and discouraged though she was, Barbara wrote to the Tilfords that night before retiring, detailing briefly her experiences and lack of success, and expressing her determination to remain in Cripple Creek until she learned what had become of Roger.

She did not sleep well, and descended early from her room, feeling that her task was one that admitted of no delay. Early as she was, she found the dining-room crowded. There were only a few women in the motley throng at the breakfast table, and these were typewriter girls employed in some of the mining offices.

As Mrs. Gibbs piloted Barbara to a seat, she astonished and bewildered her new guest by giving her a sweeping introduction to every one in the room, and explaining briefly the nature of her errand. From the landlady's direct business standpoint this was probably the correct thing to do, and Mrs. Gibbs meant well,

Barbara

but it brought a hot flush to Barbara's cheeks and made her very ill at ease.

Barbara was conscious that the men and women were staring at her now and then, and just across the table she caught the admiring and inquiring look of a young man in a clay-stained coat. This young man, she afterward knew, was Jack Nixon, and she was given occasion to remember him for many a long year.

"I am going to visit the mines to-day," she said to Mrs. Gibbs, after breakfast, "and the stamp mills. Are there any stamp mills here?"

"There is one, at the further end of the gulch, just beyond the camp," was the landlady's answer.

Barbara was again determinedly brave that morning, notwithstanding her wakeful and restless night. She visited the stamp mill first, finding the distance a long walk over rough and uneven ground. She recalled how eagerly Roger had inquired of Bexar about the peculiarities of a stamp mill, wishing to use the information in a mining story he thought of writing, and it seemed to her probable that he would visit the stamp mill while in Cripple Creek, if nothing else.

At the mill men were unloading what looked

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to be common road earth, which they had brought down from the placers on the top of Little Bull Mountain. Standing with one of the mill attendants by the side of a trough-like structure that seemed to be filled with nothing but muddy water, into which the earth from Little Bull Mountain was being thrown, while the heavy stamps thumped thunderously up and down in the mixture, Barbara lifted her voice and talked to the man of Roger, showing him the photograph which she had already carried to so many places.

Meeting with no success, she went round to the broad tables, covered with mercury, over which the muddy water, laden with its precious gold dust, was passing, and talked with the men there in the same way. The men were sympathetic and hearkened attentively, stopping their work to listen in the midst of the thudding roar of the stamps. Perhaps they were touched as much by Barbara's beauty as by her story. Then she questioned the teamsters; but no one knew anything about Roger, and no one could recall the face pictured in the photograph.

After that Barbara climbed laboriously the aspen slopes to the various mines and claims near the camp, finding that such toil made the

Barbara

thin air of that high altitude cut her lungs like a knife. A couple of Scotchmen at the Loch Lomond mine, after studying the photograph, thought they had seen "thot mon" somewhere, at some time, but their ideas on the subject were so vague that Barbara, who had been thrown into a flutter of hope by their words, was forced to put aside their recollections and statements as wholly unreliable and worthless.

She returned to the Placer Hotel late in the afternoon, having pursued her search with feverish energy. She acquainted Mrs. Gibbs with her lack of success, as she sat down to the deserted dining-table.

"There is one man in town, that I had n't thought of, who might help you by giving you some points, even if he does n't know anything about your husband, Mrs. Timberly," said kind-hearted Mrs. Gibbs. "That's old Jeb Benson. He knows more about the mines and the mountains than any man in Cripple Creek. I don't know how many years he's been mining and prospecting. Wherever there is a new 'find,' there you'll be sure to meet Benson, and that's why he is here. You'll find his little cabin at the top of the first hill on the left, after turning the second street cor-

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ner. It isn't far, and you might have a talk with him."

"Thank you," said Barbara, getting up from the table; "I will go at once;" which she did, in spite of Mrs. Gibbs' protests.

Barbara was afraid that Benson would not be at home, but when she reached the little cabin she found him sitting in the sunshine before the door, calmly smoking his pipe.

"Evenin'," he said, when he saw that she meant to stop and address him. "Purty view here. I picked it for my home because o' that."

The view was not merely pretty, it approached the sublime. The Collegiate Mountains, the Sangre de Christo and Saguache, and far to the westward the great Main Range of the Rockies, thrust upward into the brilliant sky their shining crests. In the other direction was visible the cloud-rimmed head of hoary old Pike's Peak. In the intervening distances were pinnacles and hills, valleys and mesas, gorges and gulches, all bathed in the warm sunshine, and suffused with an ineffable glow which transformed and glorified even the heterogeneous ugliness of the camp of Cripple Creek.

Barbara looked at the old prospector rather

Barbara

than at the landscape. He was worn and bent, his face was thin and seamed, his hands knotted and calloused. He had removed his frayed, wide-brimmed hat, and scanty white locks now strayed down over the collar of his ill-fitting brown coat. Only a glance was needed to show that he had endured privations and terrible hardships. But they had not broken him. The glance of his pale blue eyes was as keen as that of a hawk, and, later, when she induced him to talk of the mines and the mountains, the eyes burned with a strange fire.

She introduced herself and her subject, and he invited her into the cabin, which she found as queer and odd in its way as the old man was in his. All round the walls were rows of shelves on which rested ore samples from all quarters of the earth. He insisted on showing these to her before he would consent to talk on the subject of her errand, pointing out this and that valuable specimen, telling her where it was from, and how much the ore would assay to the ton.

"I've had a lot of valuable properties in my hands, at one time or another," he declared, with a childish smile, "and I ain't made my pile yit. But I'm still young enough, as ye may say, and I'll make a strike

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'fore I die; see if I don't. Funny thing, prospectin' is. The burro you're ridin' kin tell as much about the ground you're goin' over as you kin. Now, I prospected all over these tarnal hills a good ten years ago, and did n't find a spoonful o' pay dirt. Then along comes some fellers that, gin'erly speakin', would n't know gold from shinin' mica, and they made a strike. I was stumped, I tell ye, when I heerd that they 'd found good color on Cripple Creek. It's all luck. If a man hain't got luck, 't ain't no use. They had luck when they was hyer, and I did n't. That explains it. But my time 'll come bimeby."

It was with difficulty that Barbara persuaded the old man to talk of her search instead of his prospecting and mining ventures, but she gained his attention finally, and, telling her story, displayed the picture.

The pale blue eyes grew reflective as the knobby fingers clutched and held the photograph.

"I knowed a feller who looked like that," said Benson, in a tone that made Barbara's heart leap, only to chill at the next sentence. "He was my pardner on the Gunnison, in 'seventy-five."

"It could n't have been Roger," Barbara

Barbara

declared. "He was never in the mountains until a few days ago."

"Well, it looks like him!" Benson asserted, getting out a pair of heavy steel-bowed spectacles, that he might study the photograph to better advantage.

"Looks more 'n ever like him now," he persisted. "His name was Wash Craddock. Him and me climbed down into a cañon over there by snubbin' the tails of our burros round the pine trees, and took out a thousand dollars wu'th of silver in two weeks."

Benson might have wandered on in this manner for a long time if Barbara had not interrupted him.

"No, I ain't never seen him, ma'am," he admitted reluctantly, "if he was n't Wash Craddock. Looks enough like him to be his brother. Wash is in Ouray now; doin' well, I'm told. I'm expectin' him up hyer, though, 'most anytime. Wash is a good 'eal like a brass band—he likes to lead the percession; that's why I'm expectin' him."

Barbara turned Benson's thoughts again to Roger; and he began to guess various wild and improbable places to which Roger might have gone in search of "color."

The old man was reluctant to have her go,

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and she lingered, listening to his talk even after all hope of gaining any information or help from him had departed, then took her way wearily back to the Placer Hotel.

"I have n't made any progress to-day," she said to Mrs. Gibbs, after detailing briefly her interview with Benson; "but I will find Roger, or find out what has become of him. I must do it, and I will."

Day by day this brave determination was pursued, in a spirit as brave. Barbara sent copies of the photograph to prominent men and officers throughout all the surrounding country; she published inquiries far and wide; she continued her visits to mines and mining claims, and talked with people in every walk of life. But Roger Timberly had dropped out of the sight of men as completely as if the earth had closed over him.

As for Bexar's claim, which had been the chief instrument in luring Roger to Cripple Creek, she found that the work necessary to hold it had not been done and that a contest had been filed against its claimant. With nothing to show that it had ever been transferred to Roger and herself, and no money with which to fight the contest, Barbara was advised that it was useless to do anything, and suffered

Barbara

the contestant to have his way. Besides, she was too deeply touched by her sorrow and too deeply immersed in her search for Roger to desire to spend time and money in quarrelling over a hole in the ground, that might in the end turn out to be worthless.

Going one day into the office of the "Daily Clipper," which she had visited frequently in her search, Barbara overheard the proprietor storming because the editor had incontinently deserted the tripod. The thought that came to her was so daring that she fairly gasped. She was at the end of her slender stock of money, and felt that she would be forced to return to the dreary claim life in Kansas, which, without Roger's presence and company, would have been intolerable.

Though her face was thinner than when she had come to Cripple Creek, it was fairer, and when she boldly invaded the composing-room where the proprietor was giving vent to his vitriolic wrath, it seemed to the angry man as if a beautiful and accusing spirit had entered the sulphurous and untidy place.

The storm of words died on his lips, and he looked at her as if she had charged him with a crime, while the grimy compositors lifted their heads from their cases and stared.

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"If you please, Mr. Matthews," she said, flushing, "I did n't intend to overhear, but I should like to apply for that vacant position."

Matthews, who was a red-faced, nervous man, stared at her, not knowing whether to take her seriously or otherwise.

"Have you had any experience?" he questioned, getting his breath at last. "Do you think you could do the work?"

"I should like to try," she urged; then began to explain how the experience gained in her work for Roger would help her.

"And I'm already so thoroughly acquainted with Cripple Creek, you know, by reason of the search I've been making," she added.

Her lips were parted and her eager hopefulness caused her eyes to shine like stars. She had seldom looked more beautiful. Matthews, hard-headed and practical, was swayed, and hesitated.

"Well — er — you see, Mrs. Timberly — that is —" her eyes began to fill with tears of disappointment — "if you really think you can do the work you might try it. I'll look after all the business, and do what little reporting I can; and there is Murkson — he handles a pencil pretty nimbly."

Murkson, a long-necked, gawky young

Barbara

man, with the keen nose of a news reporter, stared at Barbara in undisguised admiration.

"I am sure that I can do the work, Mr. Matthews," she declared, beginning to remove her hat, that Matthews might not be given time to change his mind.

She turned toward the outer room, resolved to fight back her own hesitation as stoutly as she had fought back that of the proprietor, and made her way to the vacant editorial desk, Matthews and Murkson following. Matthews came and stood by the desk, with Murkson at his side.

"Here is yesterday's 'Clipper' and some exchanges," he said, pushing them toward her. "If you'll look them over it will help you to get the run of things."

"Yes, thank you," she answered almost gayly, as she produced a pencil and drew forward a pad of paper. "You will want to say something about that big strike at the Anaconda, I suppose? I believe you are taking the side of the miners, are you not? Well, my own sympathies are naturally that way."

Matthews' red face was beginning to shine and Murkson looked delighted. Murkson could write up "news," but some one was

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needed to do the office and editorial work and keep the book accounts.

"I'm sure you can do it all right," Murkson ventured, giving her an approving glance. "I remember that when I worked over in Aspen—across the divide, you know—a lady did all of this sort of work, and she did it well."

"Yes, I think it will be all right," Matthews agreed; "and we'll assist."

Matthews helped to get out the editorial matter for the edition of that afternoon, while Murkson, called on by Barbara to do his best, fairly swamped the compositors with minor items and personals.

There could be no doubt that the edition was a success; and that night the dreams of the delighted proprietor were about equally compounded of visions of ravishingly beautiful women covering snowy paper with glittering editorials and of the arrival of the delightful day when the "Clipper" should crush out its rival and have the field of Cripple Creek all to itself, with a million-dollar tax list to publish as a supplement.

Barbara had gained her point and had proven her ability, and could now remain in Cripple Creek and continue the task that had

Barbara

brought her to the place. She entered upon her new work with a zest and energy that surprised even herself. It gave relief to the tension that had been wearing her out. She kept up persistently the search for Roger. The habit of scanning the exchanges, which had first brought her into acquaintance with Matthews, she continued, and was glad because this was now in the line of her duty.

By and by she began to take a more comprehensive interest in Cripple Creek and the rich gold fields that surround it, and felt a sort of joyous pride in the rapid growth of the place, which was developing with marvellous strides from a wild camp into a city with business blocks, electric lights, and the general outward appearance of a place of thrift and refinement. The discoveries of rich claims, the introduction of improved processes for increasing the yield of low-grade ores, the doings of the "best people," — for, strange as it may seem, Cripple Creek also had its "four hundred," — touched her in a new way. For was not Cripple Creek now her home, and she the editorial autocrat of its leading afternoon paper?

The summer and fall passed quickly. The snow line began to creep down the sides of the

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high peaks. The green and gold of the leaves, which had made of every hilltop a flaunting Hibernian banner, passed away. Then winter came, with its fierce storms and its cold.

Barbara wrote now and then to the Tilfords, who were still caring for her stock and poultry, her desire being to keep the old home just as it was should Roger return to occupy it with her.

She continued her toil in the office of the "Clipper," to the perfect satisfaction of both Matthews and Murkson; seemed, in fact, to become a fixture there, like the editorial table; and the mystery of Roger's disappearance remained as much of a mystery as at first. She was beginning now to think of him as dead.

Thus two years and a half passed away.

CHAPTER V

JACK NIXON'S RECOLLECTIONS

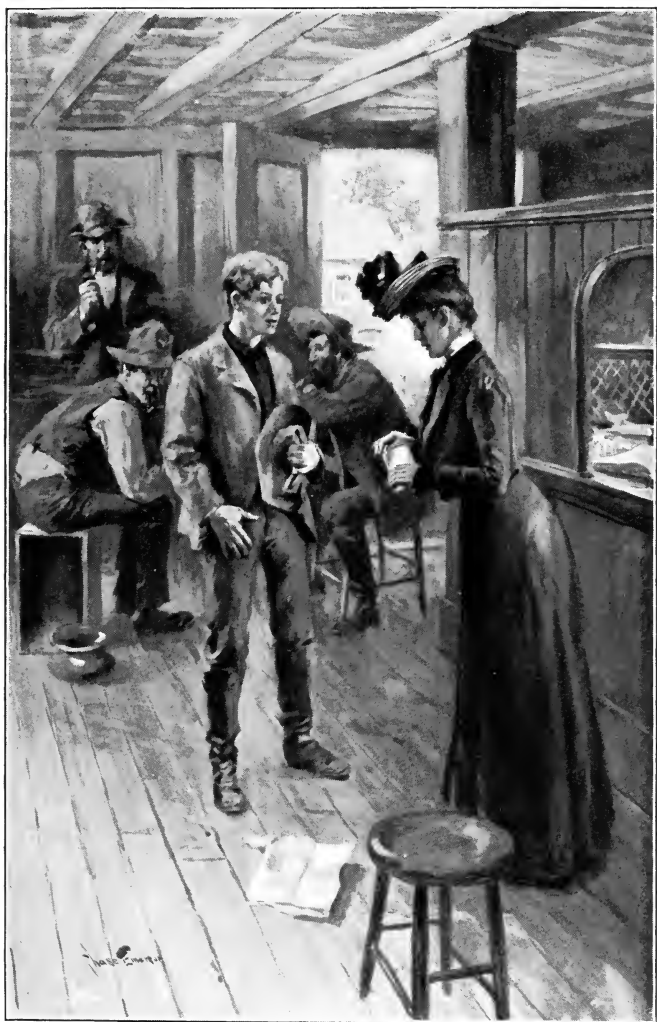
RETURNING one day to her room at the Placer Hotel, which she still occupied, Barbara found Jack Nixon, in clay-stained clothing and boots, awaiting her in the office.

"What is it, Jack?" she questioned, when she saw by his manner that he wished to speak with her.

"I found it in the mine this mornin'," he said, advancing with some hesitation. "I reckon it belonged to your husband."

Barbara paled and trembled as she took a packet from his hand. Hastily tearing away the newspaper covering she found a mildewed envelope, and across its expansive front the name "R. H. Timberly," in Roger's handwriting. Her hands shook as she drew out the contents, — two letters written by her to Roger, and a soiled railway map of Colorado.

"You'll want to see the place where it was found, likely?" said young Nixon, in a troubled voice.



Jack Nixon's Recollections

"Yes, I'll go with you at once. There was nothing — nothing else?" her imagination picturing horrible discoveries.

"Not a thing," Jack assured her. "I turned it up with my shovel. You see, there had been blasting, and it had got covered up in that way, I reckon. But there was n't anything else."

A sudden thought came to her. Asking him to wait a minute, she ran upstairs to her room and took from the little mantel Roger's photograph, and soon put it in Nixon's hands.

"You've been working in that mine a good while, have n't you?" she asked. "My husband may have visited it. I don't remember whether I ever showed you this or not."

She was flushed with excitement, though striving to be calm. Jack Nixon stared hard at the photograph and turned it over before replying. On the back was written "R. H. Timberly."

"So that's your husband!" he said slowly. "I never seen his picture before. I recollect that face, and I wish you'd showed me this sooner. He stayed at the hotel hyer and walked down to the mine with me one mornin'. But I'd forgot that he said his name was

Barbara

Timberly. I suppose that's what throwed me."

Barbara was now shaking as with an ague. Jack Nixon continued to stare at the photograph, wrinkling his brow in thought.

"Seems to me 't there was a feller come up hyer to the hotel t' see him," he continued. "Yes, I'm shore of it. It's hard to recollect little things, y' know. They got acquainted down town, or something like that; and they set right over there by the winder an' talked a good 'eal the evenin' before Mr. — your husband — went with me down to the mine."

"Can you recall the man's name?" was her anxious question.

"No, I can't," he confessed, scratching his head in perplexity. "Faces stick t' me, but I ain't good at names."

"Or anything they said?"

"It keeps comin' t' me all the time that they was talkin' bout San Something-or-other — San Diego, it seems t' me. Ain't they some old ruins o' some kind er other — houses mebbe — round San Diego?"

"Some old Spanish mission churches, I believe," was Barbara's tremulous answer.

His face lighted.

"Must 'a' been that, then. 'Pears t' me

Jack Nixon's Recollections

that it was some queer old houses they was talkin' about—but it might 'a' been churches—must 'a' been. I'm mighty near dead certain that that was the place."

Barbara knew that it was just like Roger to take fire at the thought of visiting the Spanish mission churches; but she knew also that it was not like him to undertake such a trip without informing her of his intention.

Instead of returning the photograph to its place on the mantel in her room she dropped it into her hand-bag with the packet of letters, and went with Jack Nixon to the street when he had no further information to impart. Five minutes later they were hurrying toward the Amazon mine.

A sharp "Halt!" brought them to a full stop at the foot of a rocky slope. A gray-shirted miner stood in the path armed with a Winchester. The Amazon was a contested mine; and those in possession, having strong faith in their "nine points of law," had surrounded the shaft and the buildings with an armed guard pending the result of the big legal battle that was in progress.

Jack Nixon stated the object of their mission, and the guard stood aside and permitted them to pass. The manager, whom they

Barbara

visited in his shed-like office, listened graciously to Barbara's story, and after inspecting the photograph and the packet of letters consented to the search of the mine.

Nothing came of it, however ; though Barbara saw the place where the packet had been turned up by Nixon's spade, and followed the light of the lantern to the farthest end of the tunnel.

The afternoon was far spent when she reached the office of the "Clipper." The place was in confusion, the work much behind ; Matthews, groaning over some proofs, was in the depths of despair. His face cleared when he saw her. He pushed the proofs toward her ; and she, taking them up, seated herself at the editorial desk and went to work.

Not until the forms were on the press and the edition was being ground out did Barbara acquaint Matthews with the story of the discovery of the letters, of Jack Nixon's recollections, and of her determination to start at once for California. Matthews' red face assumed a look of perplexity and regret.

"It will be a wild-goose chase," he asserted in his blunt way, twisting anxiously in his chair and looking straight at her.

"Jack Nixon's tongue is a good deal of a

Jack Nixon's Recollections

bell-clapper. It's my opinion, Mrs. Timberly, that whatever became of your husband, he is dead long ago. Let's see! How long have you been here?"

"More than two years," said Barbara.

"And you have n't left a stone unturned, I can say that for you. Now, does it seem at all likely that when you've failed here, after all that you've done, that you can hope to do anything in California? I don't think your husband went to California. Nixon simply made a wild grasshopper jump at conclusions. There are hundreds of places out here in the West that begin with San."

His words distressed her; not because they weakened her resolution, but because they showed her how slender was this new thread which she had determined to follow. Matthews, who was studying her face, interpreted its changed expression as an indication that his argument was succeeding. He redoubled his efforts, therefore, pointing out with clear conclusion, as he thought, how improbable it was that Roger was still alive and how hopeless the task of making further search for him. To his dismay, as he talked on, he saw the beautiful, thoughtful face harden into iron determination.

"What you say is all too true," Barbara

Barbara

admitted, as he ceased talking. "But it does n't change me. Perhaps it is foolish for me to think of going to San Diego. Jack Nixon is n't positive that was the place, as you say. But what Jack remembers is good proof that Roger left Cripple Creek, and shows me that I have thrown away more than two years in the search here. When I began work here with you, Mr. Matthews, it was solely for the purpose of earning money to enable me to go on with my search. But for that I should never have had the audacity to apply for the place or make such a venture. But the determination of my life, to find Roger if he is living or if he is dead, gave me courage to do things I should have shrunk from under other circumstances."

"You've made the best editor I ever had!" said Matthews, bluntly but stoutly. "Egad! Mrs. Timberly, you're a woman in a thousand. How you do it I don't know, but you write a better political leader and mining leader than half the editors in Colorado. Maybe you caught the knack from your husband, as you sometimes say, but I think it was born in you. If you do go, I don't know what's to become of the 'Clipper.'"

That was the thing that touched Matthews most. He was not a writer himself, though a

Jack Nixon's Recollections

hustling and successful manager, and he had come to rely so wholly on Barbara's editorial tact, strength, and knowledge, that without her he felt as the swimmer feels in mid ocean with the life raft torn from his hands.

"I must go!" she said. "There may be a clue in or near San Diego, and if I should fail to find it simply because I did not try, I could never forgive myself. It is impossible for me to remain here now and go on with the work as I have done. I can't tell you how it pains me to think of the time I've already wasted here. I should simply fret myself into a fever if I stayed. You have been very kind to me, Mr. Matthews, and so has Murkson, and all the employees. I want to be very grateful, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all you have done for me; but indeed I cannot stay. It is not that I desire to leave you, but that I must leave you. Whatever comes of it, and however much I may regret it hereafter, I must go."

Matthews saw that it was useless to argue the matter further.

"When will you start?" he asked.

"To-night. I must go at once."

"Then, of course, you'll want some money," he said, reaching for an account book. "The

Barbara

suddenness of the thing rather knocks me out, but if you must go, I hope that everything will turn out as you want it. I don't know where I shall get another editor, and I never expect to get another that can stack up good, strong copy like you can. That last editorial of yours on the reorganization of the legislature hit like a sledge hammer. It's being commented on all over the State. Excuse me for using strong language, Mrs. Timberly — but, damme, it simply paralyzes me to think of running the 'Clipper' without you!"

Murkson bustled in from the street; and when Matthews, wheeling round in his swivel chair with the account book in his hand, told him of Barbara's intention, Murkson sank with breathless disgust into the nearest seat and stared at her with the reproachful look of a harried crane.

"First opportunity comes my way I'll give Jack Nixon a roast for that in the locals," he growled. "It's all rot and nonsense. Why, the 'Clipper' will go to the everlasting bowwows!"

Murkson was so wrought up that, when Matthews began to cast up Barbara's account, he found it needful to go on into the composing-room, where Barbara dimly heard him voic-

Jack Nixon's Recollections

ing his deep disgust and swearing like a train robber.

He came out, however, followed by the compositors, to bid her good-bye, and he and Matthews went with her as far as the office steps and stood outside in the brisk, cold air for a final word.

"I'm sure I wish you success," said Matthews. "Good-bye."

"It'll bu'st the 'Clipper!'" groaned Murk-son, wringing her hand until her fingers ached.

"I should n't go if I did n't feel that I must," she answered, almost in a tone of apology. "I shall never forget your kindness. Good-bye."

They retreated into the office, waving their hands to her ; then the door, caught by a gust of wind, closed with a bang and seemed to thrust her out into the world again, a stranger.

CHAPTER VI

THE JOURNEY TO THE SUNSET SEA

ANOTHER day found Barbara in a tourist sleeper which was storming across the barren wastes of New Mexico. Ugly adobe houses squatted in arroyos and beside the few streams, where lazy Mexicans, half-breeds, and Pueblo Indians lounged and chattered, and the shadow on the dial of time seemed to have been turned back a hundred years.

She had risen early, having slept fairly well, and felt much refreshed, when the train came to a stand-still. A freight train, striking a steer at the entrance of a long trestle, had been hurled into a defile and the trestle demolished.

We know not on what event, great or small, hinges our future. It was an ordinary accident, one that might have occurred on any railway in almost any land, yet it was destined to alter the whole course of Barbara's life.

As there was no likelihood that her train could proceed for hours, she descended from the sleeper to inspect the wreck. Here, where a car, laden with groceries and tobaccos, lay

The Journey to the Sunset Sea

shattered, the male passengers were helping themselves to cigars. A little farther on a consignment of bicycles was crushed and twisted into scrap iron. The odor of kerosene from broken tanks impregnated the air. But no person had been hurt, as Barbara was thankful to learn.

A man had been sent to the nearest telegraph office. By nine o'clock a wrecking train came, and then another. An hour later two passenger trains, in addition to the one that had borne Barbara, were hissing and simmering beside the defile. One was from the East and the other from the West; and when it was seen that the task of clearing away the wreck and repairing the trestle was likely to be dragged out indefinitely, the work of transferring from train to train was begun.

Barbara saw her trunk dragged and carried across the defile by swarthy, Indian-like workmen, and followed it herself with considerable difficulty. The coach from the West, which she was now to occupy, was a Santa Fé tourist sleeper, as hers had been; but in it were also placed people from the first-class Pullman of the other westward-bound train.

Hardly was Barbara settled in her new position when her attention was drawn to a lady

Barbara

who, with her three children, occupied the opposite double berth. The youngest child, a mite of three years, in stumbling about the floor fell and hurt herself and began to cry. Barbara, who happened to be near, picked her up, set her on her feet, and soothed her before the mother could arrive.

"We have had such a tiresome wait," the woman ventured, with a kindly smile. "Ruth is quite worn out. We shall all be glad, I'm sure, when we're again in motion. The trip to California is quite long enough, without such delay."

"Then you are going to California too?" Barbara asked as she relinquished the child.

"Yes; to San Diego."

Barbara could not forbear a further question. People are not stiffly formal in the West, and the ice being thus broken the two women were soon conversing in a friendly way.

Barbara learned that the lady was Mrs. Palmer Lake, of Denver, that her husband was a Denver merchant and mine owner, and that they had a winter residence in San Diego. It was easy to see that they were wealthy people, though Mrs. Lake was travelling without maid or nurse. She had been with her children in the Pullman sleeper.

The Journey to the Sunset Sea

The train started at last, and at the first turn-table the engine reversed its position and the sleepers were put in the rear. After that the long westward journey began again, and soon the sandy wastes of Eastern Arizona were about them, with the pine-clad region surrounding Flagstaff just ahead.

As large herds of cattle were now and then seen, Barbara got out at a station in this half-desert country and tried to procure some milk for the Lake children, and a fruit-jar in which to carry it. To her surprise she learned that the cows were never milked, and that a glass fruit-jar was almost an unheard-of thing. It was worse than being "ten miles from a lemon."

For more than two days and nights Barbara travelled in this sleeper, becoming much attached to Mrs. Lake in that time, and gaining the affection of the children. In addition to these acquaintances and the other people in the coach, there were many things to interest her and distract her mind somewhat from the nature of her mission. At The Needles, that queerly named town near the great Colorado River, Moqui men were seen working as section hands, and Moqui Indian women, dark-faced and repulsive-looking, in tatters and rags, like the

Barbara

beggars who came to town, but with nothing of the "silken gown" in their appearance, besieged the passengers with offerings of gayly decorated bows and arrows and other articles of Indian workmanship.

In addition to the human conglomerate of the Southwest were the seemingly endless deserts into which the train ran after leaving the Colorado River behind. Barbara had always thought of California as the land of luxuriant vegetation, but discovered that much of it is as barren as the Great Sahara. Everywhere stretched those treeless, grassless levels of sand and pebbles, of sun-baked mud flats, of snow-white wastes of blinding alkali, all broken and shut in here and there with seamed and corrugated ridges of obsidian and black lava and heat-drenched rocks, burned and seared by the suns of unnumbered years.

Barbara was much affected by the lonely station and the pathetic little graveyard at Barstow, with the sand drifting across it as if trying to hide the graves, so suggestive of the probable fate of Roger. She was glad when the desert was passed and the train began to climb the San Bernardino Mountains; for beyond those mountains, as she was told, and as she soon knew for herself, the sap of life

The Journey to the Sunset Sea

begins to run again in the veins of nature, and the world, which in the desert seems so old, worn, and wrinkled, puts fresh color in its face, like an ancient dame who thus hides the ravages of the years, and becomes, outwardly at least, young, blooming, and beautiful.

After the mountains were crossed the train whizzed down the fair valley of the San Joaquin into the citrus belt, with its sunshine and its laden orange-trees, and on and on through a paradise of groves and flowers, of vine-clad homes, smiling villages, and thriving cities; and still on and on, at first westward and then southward, until there came, for the first time to Barbara, the flash and roar of the billows of the mighty Pacific.

When San Diego was reached in the late evening, and Barbara, descending from the train, saw a husband rush forward to greet his wife, the sight so filled her with thoughts of Roger that she almost felt he must be waiting for her there. And when he did not appear and she climbed at last into a cab she was overwhelmed with such a sense of helplessness and impotency as she had never before experienced.

Barbara began her search in San Diego and the near-by towns in a systematic manner, and made it as thorough as circumstances and means

Barbara

permitted. She visited the mission churches of Southern California, — San Luis Rey, San Juan de Capistrano, and all the others. She patiently inspected the registers of all the hotels.

Time was consumed in this, and the earnings she had hoarded in Cripple Creek slipped away. Apparently there was nothing for her to do but to return to Cripple Creek, which was now in the icy grip of winter. She did not desire to do that, though not because she feared the cold. Patient waiting in Cripple Creek had given her the one thread that seemed to lead in the direction of Roger. It had guided her to San Diego. Patient waiting here might give another clue, and lead her to him at last.

With her funds gone, Barbara began to look about for employment. There were no openings anywhere. The bursting of the "boom" bubble had made places scarce and applicants many. In this dilemma she recalled the invitation of Mrs. Palmer Lake, which had been as emphatic as it had been kindly :

"If I can ever be of assistance to you, don't fail to come to me."

Barbara felt the need of assistance now, and it seemed the part of wisdom to seek the aid

The Journey to the Sunset Sea

of one so wealthy and influential. A few words from Mrs. Lake in her favor, or a letter of introduction, might aid in securing a position, which, if not so good as the one she had held in the "Clipper" office, would yet give her the means of living, and assist her in a further effort to find Roger.

Mrs. Lake's winter residence was back on the hills in the landward suburb of the little city, and was reached by a trolley line, hence was not difficult of access. It was a handsome place, with ample flower-filled grounds, as Barbara had time to observe as she approached the door. Eucalyptus, and Chinese pepper-trees with their bright scarlet berries showing amid the green of their willow-like leaves, bordered the streets and added to the charm of the place.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Lake, as she greeted Barbara, "why did n't you come to me long ago? I have thought of you so many times, and wondered what had become of you."

This greeting made it easy for Barbara to ask the favor which had brought her there; so, in as brief a way as possible, she stated the nature of her errand.

Mrs. Lake was a slight woman, with a certain air of timidity and a pleasant motherly

Barbara

face. She took a seat in a large arm-chair as Barbara talked, and listened with much interest.

"Do you know," she said, "that I'm selfish enough to be glad that you failed to find a position. I've been looking round for a competent governess for the children, and if—"

She hesitated and searched Barbara's face.

"Oh, Mrs. Lake, would you give me the place?" was Barbara's instant question, her fine gray eyes lighting with enthusiasm.

Thus it was settled. Barbara became children's governess at Mrs. Lake's, and entered upon a routine that was very pleasant. Mrs. Lake was leading a quiet life, and Barbara was admitted to the family circle on terms of friendly intimacy and equality. Her work occupied much of her time, and enabled her better to bear the new disappointment that was hers because of this latest failure in the search for Roger. Mrs. Lake was kind and sympathetic, and the children, if somewhat spoiled, were attractive and intelligent. As for Mr. Lake, Barbara did not see him at all, as his business interests held him in Denver.

CHAPTER VII

GILBERT BREAM

INTO the quiet of this home and into the new quiet of Barbara's life came a man who was destined to influence strongly the course of her future. This man was Gilbert Bream, Mrs. Lake's brother. Bream arrived from Denver without heralding his coming, and Barbara met him for the first time at the breakfast table. She had heard Mrs. Lake speak of him in a general way, of his mines and his property interests in Denver, but had scarcely bestowed on him a thought until now, when he stood before her, bowing and acknowledging the introduction given by Mrs. Lake.

Mrs. Lake was both proud and fond of her brother. With sisterly forbearance she ignored his faults. Somewhere in the past, as she knew, there had been a love affair. His heart had been "broken" then, but since very effectively mended. That unfortunate love affair had harmed him in another way, however,—it had taught him to look on most

Barbara

women as weak or mercenary, on some as both. There was only one woman in the world in whom he had implicit faith, and that one was his sister. Mrs. Lake noticed the glance of admiration which he bent on Barbara, and was not pleased. She recalled that old love affair.

Gilbert Bream's manners were unaffected and Western, with a suggestion of the out-of-doors. Yet he liked luxurious things, books and pictures, and had theories about literature and art, as Barbara discovered during the conversation of the morning.

The next time Barbara met Gilbert Bream face to face and on terms of apparent equality was at Coronado, one of the pleasure resorts of San Diego people. She had driven with Mrs. Lake to the peninsula by way of the ferry, thus crossing an arm of beautiful San Diego Bay, thence up through palm-bordered drives to the hotel and the ocean.

The glorious California sunshine spilled down through the haze of the spray, and the waves rolling in in great white surges broke thunderously on the crescent beach. While sitting with the children on the white algæ-littered sand, under the shade of a big sun-umbrella, a shadow fell at Barbara's feet, and, looking up, she beheld Gilbert Bream.

Gilbert Bream

"Let me enjoy this with you," he said with a smile, seating himself at her side. "I don't know where there is another ocean view as pretty as this."

Barbara, glancing toward the hotel, saw Mrs. Lake approaching leisurely. She smiled back at Bream, agreed that the view was fine, and they began to talk. She found it very pleasant to sit there and converse with this man, who seemed to bring with him so much of that world of which she was ignorant. She said little herself, but proved a delightful listener, a smile on her lips and the color coming and going in her cheeks.

Though Barbara did not know it, she had changed greatly since the days of her "claim" life on the miragy plains of Kansas. She had seemed then little more than a girl; now she was a woman, with a maturer beauty and a more entrancing personality. Her mental horizon was broader and more sympathetic, her emotions not so tumultuous but deeper. Both her outward beauty and her inner life had gained much more than they had lost.

"Enjoying yourselves!" said Mrs. Lake, as she came up.

Bream laughed in his whole-hearted way and boyishly tossed some sand into the air.

Barbara

"Never better," he admitted.

"An' we'se most got our house done," said Ruth, spading away with childish enthusiasm.

Gordon, aged eight, kicked his heels in the air and shied a pebble at a swooping gull.

"There was a time," said Bream, "when an ocean, or at any rate a sea, must have rolled just that way across your plains of Kansas, Mrs. Timberly."

She laughed.

"I don't remember it; I've heard of it, though! One of my Kansas neighbors in digging a well came upon some large bones that were thought to be representative of old marine life."

Her face clouded at that remembrance of Roger and Kansas. Bream did not notice it, and continued to talk of the sea, and its wonders, past and present. As yet he knew nothing of Roger.

Ruth finished her "house" and was ready then to abandon it, and all walked together down the peninsula just beyond the reach of the flooding surges, the children chasing into the surf after shells and seaweed.

Sandpipers flitted on before them, and white and gray pelicans swooped and circled in the midst of the crying gulls. Portuguese fishing-

Gilbert Bream

boats swung on the tide with Australian and English steamers in the bay, or tacked outward across the shining, white-capped sea toward their fishing-grounds. Southward lay the blue mountains of Lower California ; northward, near at hand, gleaming like marble in its coating of white paint, and flashing back the sunshine as if it were some glittering stronghold of the enchanted land of childhood, the great winter hostel known as the Hotel del Coronado lifted its imposing front ; while on the landward side, across the bay, the little city nestled and dreamed by the margins of its white asphalt streets, with the drowsing bare hills behind it showing an emerald tint from the effects of the winter rains.

A walk by the sea is an effective appetizer.

"I'm hungry," Gordon announced.

"Here's another boy that's hungry," said Bream, referring to himself. "We'll have something to eat."

There was a luncheon in the hotel ; after which they inspected the curiosities in the hotel museum, and followed this by another short walk along the sounding beach. Mrs. Lake did not fail to notice that Bream seemed bent on prolonging as much as possible Barbara's stay on the peninsula.

Barbara

As for Barbara, she had seldom so enjoyed herself. An unwonted lightness of spirit buoyed her. She was not troubled by any sense of inferiority to these people; it was a mere matter of diverse circumstances that had given her poverty and then riches. And as wealth sometimes comes easily and quickly in the West, — it had come that way to Gilbert Bream and to Mrs. Lake, — in the friendly intercourse of those who have and those who lack, social distinctions are often forgotten.

This pleasant afternoon at Coronado Beach was followed by others. Barbara seldom went anywhere now with Mrs. Lake and the children, that Bream did not contrive to become one of the company. He planned little excursions for them, — to Old Town, Pacific Beach, National City, the curious sea-caves of La Jolla. They enjoyed drives together over the hills that bulwark the trim little city by the sea, — hills becoming daily more fresh and vernal, but which, when first seen by Barbara, were wastes of treeless aridity. They picnicked in the cañons where the manzanita scrub sprawls over the rocks and the gnarled, squat oaks make deeper the shadows, and they boated on the tide-swept bay. Ostensibly Gilbert Bream was exercising his ingenuity in providing pleasure

Gilbert Bream

for Mrs. Lake and the children. Barbara accompanied them because she was the governess. To all seeming it would have been the same to Bream if she had been left behind.

As deception of any kind was foreign to Barbara's nature, she did not try to conceal the pleasure which these trips gave her. She was fond of outings, and this fondness had never been so gratified. And she liked Bream. That was the word in her thought — she had loved Roger. As the governess of the children she rewarded Bream with a commendatory warmth of feeling for his goodness and kindness of heart. She never forgot that she was merely the governess ; but at the same time she was charmingly frank and cordial, not thinking to conceal her delight in his conversation and company.

Bream was a good talker. He had read and travelled much. Roger lost by comparison, for Roger had often been dull and inclined to moodiness. Roger had a thin chest, a sallow face, and sunken eye ; Bream's bronzed features were clear-cut and almost handsome.

That he was something more than a carpet knight, — that he had a quick eye, a firm hand, coolness and courage under difficult and perilous circumstances, — events hastened to show.

Barbara

Barbara was given a view of this unexpected side of his character by an afternoon sail beyond the harbor in a cat-boat.

An off-shore breeze and an outward algæ-drifting tide had borne them seaward through the channel. Portuguese fishing-boats were tacking here and there, the waves were flattened into a gentle swell, and the blue Pacific mounted before them to the western sky. Point Loma light-house stood out clear and distinct in a crystalline atmosphere.

After a pleasant run up the coast Bream brought the cat-boat about, headed it in the direction of the channel, and cast anchor at a point where he knew there was good fishing. Soon baited hooks were in the water and the sport had begun.

The children did most of the fishing, however. Bream baited a hook or removed a fish now and then, but he forgot his own line and seldom caught anything. Fishes big and little nibbled away, unnoticed, the strips of shark's flesh that served as the lure, and more than half the time his line swung baitless in the water. He was talking to Barbara, who did not care to fish, but who greatly enjoyed hearing him ramble on about fishing-trips in Cuban waters, of shooting flying-fish as one shoots birds on

Gilbert Bream

the wing, farther up the California coast, and of hour-long struggles with the giant tarpon of Florida.

Mrs. Lake listened with a commendatory smile. It contented her to know that the children were having a delightful day. She was having a delightful day herself, propped with soft cushions, and gazing at the blue sky overhead when she was not looking at her brother.

"And that accident you had at the barracudæ grounds!" she said by way of stimulating reminder.

"Yes; that was a bit thrilling, but it came out all right," he said. "We were just off there beyond Point Loma and heading —"

He lifted himself on the thwart with pointing finger turned to the sea, but the sentence died on his lips. Barbara, who had been reclining against the side of the boat with fingers trailing in the water, observed the curious break and roused herself; her senses had been in a dreamy lull. Mrs. Lake looked up expectantly, and Bream struggled to his feet.

The fishing-boats had all disappeared save one, which was flying toward the harbor like a frightened gull. Cat's-paws were crinkling the water seaward; behind the cat's-paws chased

Barbara

an open-mouthed greenish cloud. It seemed to revolve from the centre outward, its frayed top casting off feathery rolls that flew on its front, while its base churned the sea into foam.

In the sleepy swell that rocked the cat-boat there was no portent of impending peril. The cloud was not yet close enough to make its influence felt. It had apparently risen with incredible rapidity, though the disappearance of the fishing-boats showed that by them its coming had been for some time discerned. The reflection that the sea is always treacherous, and that he had dawdled into forgetfulness of this fact, gave Bream an uneasy qualm. After a glance landward and at the channel he drew a knife and hastily cut away the line that held the anchor.

"If you will help me to reef the sail!" he said, addressing Barbara. "That squall is coming up pretty fast. Sister mine, get into the centre of the boat, low down, with the children."

His sentences were staccato, as if both time and breath were precious, but he was not flurried. Mrs. Lake, with face grown pale, hurried the children into the middle of the boat. Barbara sprang to Bream's assistance. For a moment he seemed in doubt whether to run

Gilbert Bream

for the shore and endeavor to beach the boat in what certainly would have been a dangerous surf, or to head away for the farther channel in an effort to gain the sheltered bay. His hesitancy passed.

"Double this in," he said, "and tie the reef-points;" and Barbara, who knew nothing about such things, but who was quick to catch an idea, assisted him in folding together a section of the canvas and in tying the cords to hold the reef in place. Then another reef was put in, and she helped him to hoist and set the reduced sail.

"We're all right now," he said, with another glance at the storm cloud. "If you will sit on the rail over there, Mrs. Timberly, as ballast, it may aid. There, that's right; now, we'll run for it."

Ruth began to cry; Mrs. Lake was frightened and the children were excited.

"Sit still in the middle of the boat there," he said sharply; "I tell you we're all right!"

He had taken the tiller, and putting the boat about he pointed the bow at the channel entrance. A breeze that was forerunner of the squall heeled the boat over and sent it flying through the waves, which curled away from the bow and dropped behind in a trail of hiss-

Barbara

ing white foam. Barbara, studying Bream's face, saw the features relax in a smile of grim determination which told her more than anything else how serious he considered their situation. He glanced at her as he shifted the tiller and perhaps read her discovery of his thought.

"I think we can make the harbor before the squall strikes," he said, reassuringly. "There is no need yet for alarm. Even if we should fail to make it, I've weathered worse squalls in smaller boats. This is a staunch little thing and handles well."

Mrs. Lake's blue eyes revealed the fear she strove to conceal from her children. Barbara sat crouched on the rail abaft the mast on the windward side, Bream being on the same side, with one hand holding the tiller and the other the sheet of the sail. She was pale, but there was not in her eyes the deep look of fear so observable in those of Mrs. Lake. Not that she regarded the approach of the squall undismayed, but she was of more courageous mould and perhaps trusted more implicitly in Gilbert Bream's seamanship, and she was not, like Mrs. Lake, a mother with the lives of her children imperilled.

The cloud, drawing ever nearer, took on



Gilbert Bream

a misty front that hid its rolling folds and greenish mouth. Thunder began to break from it, and it seemed dissolving into rain, which, as it hissed downward, the sea rose up to meet. The breeze freshened into a half gale, flattening out the waves at first, then piling them up; and the bow of the boat, cutting and plunging through them, threw across the rail a drenching, salt spray. Barbara, sitting so far forward, caught the full force of it; but, though she gasped now and then as the spray went flying over her, she clung to her position, not deeming it wise to make a change.

Gordon began to cry, adding his voice to that of Ruth. Alice, who had reached the mature age of eleven and was by nature staid and womanly, tried with her mother to quiet the crying children.

"We're 'most in now," said Alice. "I think I can see the ships inside — don't you, Gordon? Hold on tight to mamma and we're all right."

"We're all right!" shouted Bream without looking at them. He was giving his entire attention to the management of the boat, critically eyeing the sail and the sea, the tiller moving now and then under his skilful hand. "Five minutes more —"

Barbara

A big, green wave climbed over the bow and tore at Barbara as if it meant to pluck her from the rail, and she did not hear the completion of the sentence. The wave shook itself free, thrust a white hand up at the staggering sail and rolled past; and Barbara, looking ahead through the mist that began to envelop everything, saw familiar landmarks and knew that the harbor entrance was just ahead.

Bream's announcement was premature. The squall bore down now with a hissing scream; and when it struck, Barbara was sure they were all going to the bottom together. She saw the sail fly by. It had been torn from Bream's hand, or he had let go of the sheet as a measure of safety. For a half minute the cat-boat seemed buried under a mountain of water; then it righted and flew up the channel at race-horse speed, the sail splitting and streaming out before like the broken wing of a bird.

The din of the storm was deafening, the spray blinding. Barbara became conscious that the boat was half full of water, in which Mrs. Lake and the children appeared to be floating. She indistinctly heard Bream caution Mrs. Lake against trying to change her position. Then she realized that she was dreadfully frightened, thoroughly drenched, and

Gilbert Bream

shaking like a leaf. Hardly had this realization come to her when the storm seemed to abate something of its violence. The angry front of the squall had struck and passed, and the enclosing arm of the harbor was beginning to make its influence felt.

When the lump went out of her throat and the water out of her eyes Barbara looked toward Bream. He appeared to be clinging to the tiller like a drowning man, but she instantly heard him speak again to Mrs. Lake. Then she felt the boat rise on a more level keel. A moment later Bream laughed nervously and in a rather loud and unnatural way.

"That was a bit scary," he admitted; "but a miss is as good as a mile! We'll be at the landing in a little while now. Fortunately this rain can't make us any wetter."

The waves as well as the wind were driving them into the harbor—the gale was still on and the rain falling. Seeing that it was safe to do so, Barbara climbed down from the rail and tried to bail out some of the water that was so distressing Mrs. Lake and the children.

"It's no use to do that," said Mrs. Lake, clinging nervously to a thwart and with one arm round Ruth. She was almost crying.

Barbara

"You'll never get me into a cat-boat again, nor any other kind of a boat — never!"

With difficulty Bream brought the cat-boat into the lee of Spreckels' wharf. Out in the stream vessels were jumping at the ends of their cables like scared horses tugging at their halters; behind the wharf smaller boats were tossing wildly; the rain was pounding at the sooty timbers; ashore the trees were writhing and threshing in the wind. A rope was thrown to the cat-boat from a tug.

"Catch it!" said Bream to Barbara in a quick, commanding tone.

She caught it, clinging with one hand to the mast. Over the bow the torn sail dragged and fluttered. Having caught the rope she held it taut, and the tossing cat-boat was drawn to the tug, Bream leaping forward quickly to relieve her, as the two vessels seemed about to pound into each other. Men on the tug leaned over to take Bream by the hand.

"The others first," he said, as he tried to hold the boats together.

The man stretched a hand to Barbara; but she assisted the children to flounder to the bow, where they were seized by the men of the tug and whisked to its deck. Mrs. Lake followed the children; Barbara came next, then Bream.

Gilbert Bream

The cat-boat drifted round to the stern of the tug and was there made fast.

On board the tug they remained until the waves fell, then succeeded in reaching the wharf. Bream telephoned for a carriage, and they were driven home, Mrs. Lake wet and miserable, yet thankful. The children had already recovered from their fright; Gordon still clung to a small fish which he had hooked and taken from the water himself.

"I was a bit scared at the worst of it," Bream admitted to Barbara. "But it's all over now, and we'll all feel better if we can forget it. I suppose I was to blame. I did n't dream of such a thing—we've been having such beautiful weather; but I ought to have been watching for it just the same."

Barbara was in no condition for personal mental analysis. She was too wet and chilled, and she knew she had been badly scared. But she was safe now, and she would soon be comfortable. She had a feeling that Bream had saved her life. He had shown himself to be quick and resourceful. He had assumed the guidance of everything, and once or twice had been even harshly commanding. She had not known he could be that, and it had pleased her. The harshness was born of necessity, not

Barbara

anger ; it had been merely quick emphasis, not scolding. And a woman is pleased when a man does the things that ought to be done, imperiously, but without fault-finding. Bream had done that.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FALL OF CASTLE CONTENT

BEING fond of shooting, Gilbert Bream went often into the cañons and out on the hills to get a crack at the blue-backed, plume-crested California quails. From one of these trips he was brought home with a twisted ankle that confined him to the house. Chained thus to a chair he chafed like a caged animal.

"I never was made to be housed up like a monkey," he said to Barbara.

The thought of Gilbert Bream resembling a monkey in any way made her laugh.

"It is hard. Perhaps you would like me to read to you? I have n't anything to do just now."

The suggestion was invited by a glance Bream gave at a book which lay open near him.

"I've been wanting to ask you to," he confessed, with a look which she did not understand. "I heard you reading to the children yesterday. You have an excellent reading voice, Mrs. Timberly."

Barbara

"Now you flatter me," she said, taking up the book.

But she read to him, and under the influence of the music of her voice the demon of unrest seemed to go out of him as it did out of Saul at the touch of the harp of David.

"I think I should enjoy laming both ankles, just to get you to read to me," he declared, when he had listened awhile. "When you read a thing its meaning is clearer to me, more luminous I might say, than if I had read it myself. Go on, please."

"Would you like more of this?" she asked.

"You might try Tennyson," he suggested. "Not 'In Memoriam.' I waded through that myself the other day. Try his shorter pieces."

Barbara took the volume of Tennyson from the table and began to read some of the briefer poems, while Bream, lounging in his easy-chair, studied her face in its delightful play of emotions induced by the sentiments of the verses. She was reading "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere," which she had not read before, and when she came to the last verse she hesitated and stumbled, feeling Bream's eyes fixed on her face:

The Fall of Castle Content

“As she fled fast thro’ sun and shade,
The happy winds upon her played,
Blowing the ringlet from the braid :
She looked so lovely as she swayed
The rein with dainty finger-tips,
A man had given all other bliss,
And all his worldly worth for this,
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips.”

She turned to another poem, which was so short that she thought she could sense its entire significance at a glance. It was “The Eagle,” unmatched as a brief word-picture. She did not see that there might be a personal suggestion in this; for, when from his mountain walls the eagle falls like a thunderbolt of the skies, his far-seeing eye is fixed upon his prey.

“He clasps the crag with hooked hands ;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

“The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls ;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.”

There was a curious, inquiring light in Bream’s dark eyes as he studied Barbara’s face. When at last she tired of reading he talked with her, reclining in his chair with

Barbara

his ankle supported on cushions. He looked quite the invalid, except for the healthy color of his face; and Barbara, who could not help feeling that he was suffering, gave him a large measure of sympathy.

The reading was continued the next day, and for several days thereafter, sometimes within the house, sometimes out on the wide piazza. Mere acquaintance became friendship and comradeship. So it seemed to Barbara. Without wondering why, she found herself dreamily contented in his presence. If she had tried to analyze the source of her contentment she would have assigned it to the fact that she was in possession of something she had not had since Roger's disappearance, — a real home, with congenial and sympathetic friends. Certainly she did not at that time look on Gilbert Bream as a possible lover.

Though she had not forgotten Roger, her grief had lost something of its bitterness. She awoke one day to a sudden realization of this. Bream was talking, and something he said touched an old, sweet memory. Roger's face rose before her as clearly as on the day she had beheld it last, his voice sounded in her ears, and his last kiss trembled on her lips. Leaving Bream abruptly and with a clumsy

The Fall of Castle Content

apology, she fled to her room, lest he should notice the re-aroused anguish she could hardly hide.

Barbara had been strangely reluctant to speak of Roger to Gilbert Bream. She had avoided all discussion of her past, and from Bream's manner she did not believe he had any knowledge on the subject beyond a hazy idea that she was a widow. Without having any particular reason for the conviction, she felt sure that Mrs. Lake had not yet enlightened him; though just why this silence on the part of Mrs. Lake should seem a favor she would have been puzzled to say.

Barbara remained in her room the greater part of the afternoon, pleading a headache; and there was a whiteness in her face and a look of distress in her eyes when she reappeared that left no doubt in the mind of Mrs. Lake that she had suffered severely. But she seemed quite herself the next morning, and took up her work as children's governess with much of her oldtime zest, even if her conduct toward Bream showed some slight traces of restraint.

This constraint wore off by and by, Bream noting the change with pleasure and attributing it in great measure to his powers as a conversationalist. Gilbert Bream thought well of him-

Barbara

self, and certainly he had tried hard to drive the shadows from Barbara's face.

"I have been wanting to say something to you," he said in a low voice one evening. The window had been open and the sea air was penetrating. He had complained of chilliness, whereupon she had closed the window and was now placing on his shoulders a light covering.

"Yes?" she answered.

"Perhaps you have guessed it; that will save explanations."

His manner and look puzzled her and made her uneasy.

"I don't think I understand you," she said, drawing back slightly.

"Don't go away," he urged. "Fix this other corner of the wrap."

To do so she was compelled to come closer to him.

"Ah, that's better!" he said, with a catch of the breath. "And you haven't guessed? I'm afraid you aren't as quick as I thought you!"

She was bending over the chair, and as she thus stooped he put up his arm quickly, caught her tightly about the waist and drew her still closer. The words and the act bewildered and

The Fall of Castle Content

startled her. She struggled, and sought to draw away. This failing, she wrenched herself violently from his grasp.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, her face aflame.

The hue of her face and the energy of her exclamation did not disconcert him.

"Mean?" he answered. "Haven't you seen that because I'm so fond of you is why I've played the invalid so long? You certainly have seen that, Mrs. Timberly; if not, you must be blind!"

He put his coddled foot to the floor, rose from the chair, and stretching out his hands moved toward her with scarcely the suggestion of a limp. She gave him a quick, startled glance, and what she saw in his eyes frightened her. Until that moment she had not dreamed that he had been playing the hypocrite, and making his lameness an excuse for enjoying her company and obtaining a mastery over her. She recoiled under the shock of this discovery, and with a stifled cry fled from the room.

She heard the voice of Mrs. Lake at the farther end of the long corridor, but her humiliation and anger were so great that she avoided a meeting with her and hurried on to her own apartment.

Barbara

"What am I to do?" she asked herself. "To be basely insulted in that way! I can't stay in this house another minute. I can't meet Mrs. Lake. I — I —"

She stopped, overwhelmed by the conviction that she had herself played a part. Even if his intentions were of the best, which she could hardly believe, never a hint had she given him that she was a married woman, that she was not a widow, or at least did not so consider herself. She was still clinging to the belief and the hope that somewhere in the wide world Roger Timberly was living and would one day be restored to her, yet she had never acquainted Gilbert Bream with that fact. It seemed to her now that by her silence she had wronged Roger, this man, and herself.

"It is my fault," she admitted. "I have dealt unfairly by him."

She stood in hesitation for a time, then came to the firm determination to leave the house at once without again seeing either Bream or Mrs. Lake. Such explanations as were due to Mrs. Lake, if it were possible to make any that would be satisfactory, could be better made by pen than by tongue.

Putting together some articles she rolled them into a bundle, then descended softly to

The Fall of Castle Content

the first floor and succeeded in gaining the street without attracting attention. Night was about her, and the lines of lighted street lamps seemed to beckon her toward the heart of the little city.

She needed first of all shelter, and a place where she could hide herself from the eyes of men and think, think, think over the occurrence of the evening and what had led up to it, and of the problem of the future.

She found a quiet lodging-house on a side street finally. It was bright and clean, if humble, and she entered gratefully into the room to which she was shown. Having put down her bundle and her little travelling-bag and locked the door, she drew a chair to the window and sat staring out into the street as if in a trance. Cabs and carriages rolled by, and men and women passed laughing and talking, but she was conscious of none of these things. She was looking into the past and into her own heart and conduct, searching for some scrap of evidence which would convict her of wrongdoing or encouragement in her attitude toward Gilbert Bream. She found nothing, except some motes of kindness which she magnified into mountains of indiscretion, and added to her misery by their contemplation.

Barbara

She became conscious at last that the street had grown quiet, and awoke to a realization that the hour was very late.

"He intended it as an insult," she said to herself, at last. "He thinks I am a base woman."

The touch of the pillow did not bring drowsiness, and for long hours she lay awake, counting out the time by the strokes of the clock in the lodging-house office, while the events of her recent past came before her in review and the future stretched out into a troubled uncertainty. She slept at last in an uneasy way, tossing and moaning and muttering broken sentences containing the names of Roger and Gilbert Bream.

CHAPTER IX

THE DOVE IN THE HAWK'S NEST

WHEN Barbara arose in the morning she tried to think seriously of the situation in which she was now placed. She had only enough money to pay for board and lodging for a few days. Mrs. Lake, kind-hearted as she was, was haphazard in matters of money. Barbara had shrunk from asking for her salary except when she absolutely required it. As a result her pay was far in arrears, and having left the house without seeing Mrs. Lake she had only the small sum that was at the time in her purse.

"I cannot go back there," she decided, as she thought over the matter. "I simply cannot. And I cannot write to her yet, for I don't know what to say, and if I write Mr. Bream may try to seek me out. I shall have to get along as well as I can without the money. And I must look for a place where I can earn a little something."

As the morning advanced she began a cau-

Barbara

tious search for such a place, at every turn filled with the dread of meeting Gilbert Bream, for San Diego is but a small city. She did not see him, and she found no employment.

Seeking the post office, she there wrote a letter to Mr. Tilford, instructing him to sell her ponies and buggy, and to see if it would be possible for her to dispose of Roger's land claim. Tilford had himself purchased the cow and the poultry. If he could sell the ponies and buggy, which she knew he did not want to buy, that would supply her with the money she so much needed now; but she was well aware that he would probably experience difficulty in finding a purchaser, and in any event she could anticipate no immediate assistance from that source.

As night came on, and she was still unsuccessful in her search for employment, she turned into a restaurant, attracted by its bright and tidy appearance.

"I am afraid I shall have to go back to Cripple Creek," was her thought. "Mr. Matthews would send me money for my fare, I know, if I should write or telegraph to him for it."

But she did not wish to return to Cripple Creek, which she had exhausted as a field of

The Dove in the Hawk's Nest

search for Roger. Her desire was to remain in San Diego, in the hope that she could there find another clue, and she now accused herself of having almost forgotten this search — the one object of her life — while she dreamed away the precious days in the company of a man who had proven himself perfidious.

As she passed from the dining-room she observed the proprietor chewing at a pencil and wrinkling his brows over some troublesome figures in an account book. The suggestion came that here was something she might do, — assist this man and perhaps receive in return her meals until she could find a position. She approached the high desk behind which he stood and spoke to him.

“Eh! what is it?” he demanded, in a sharp, high voice.

Barbara shrank a little before this outburst, but began to put her thought into words.

“Perhaps you have some work that I could do? I need employment to pay for my board for a few days, and it has occurred to me that I might be able to help you with your book-keeping.”

“Do my own bookkeeping,” said the man, whose name was Nugent. “Ain’t much to do here. Cash house, ye see!”

Barbara

He stared at her.

"Come round in the mornin'," he invited. "Feller over there—lawyer and real estate," he jerked his head toward a door behind him, "needs a likely young female to help in his biz; he told me so only to-day. You might git the job; I dunno. Worth tryin', I reckon. Good-day."

He took the pencil from behind his ear, dropped his eyes to the account book, and became again lost in contemplation of the figures. He had meant to be kind, she thought, yet his ferrety red eyes, his piercing glances, his high voice and coarse manner were decidedly unpleasant.

Nevertheless, so urgent was her need that she returned to the place the next morning, re-introduced herself to Nugent, and was by him piloted into a little office behind the restaurant.

"Girl fer ye," said Nugent; and ducked back into the restaurant, leaving Barbara staring at a young man whose feet were elevated on a roll-top desk and who was smoking a cigar. A map of San Diego ornamented the wall at his back. Near it was a big calendar. The table itself was piled high with vegetables, in whose shadows inkstands, pens, and writing materials were lost. Other vegetables were in

The Dove in the Hawk's Nest

the corners of the room. One of the chairs was filled with very red beets, another with white California grapes; in the office windows were pumpkins, gigantic squashes, and strings of half-husked Indian corn. It was like entering a stall in a vegetable market. Above the outer door and extending out over the sidewalk was a big gilt sign, announcing that this was the law and real estate office of Selby Spencer, and that persons looking for bargains in California bonanza real estate would make the mistake of their lives if they did not call on him at once.

Mr. Selby Spencer pulled down his feet and removed his cigar when he saw Barbara standing before him. She did not like his appearance. For one thing, his whitish eyes were watery and his cheeks had the puffy look given by indulgence in intoxicants. But she stated the nature of her errand, while the young man, placing a chair for her, from which he had to remove the bunches of grapes before she could occupy it, looked at her with marked interest.

"Glad Nugent showed you in," he said. "I do need some help in my efforts to let people understand what they're missing by not investing in California real estate at this time, when the boom has passed and everything

Barbara

is so low in price. I'm pushing my advertising as much as I can; just now I've got some letters over there to be manifolded. You might go to work on them if you like, Miss — ”

“ Mrs. Timberly,” she corrected.

He looked disappointed.

“ Husband living here? ”

“ He is not living here.”

“ No? Well, you can begin work on those letters, and I'll give you the addresses to which they're to be sent.”

He stopped and looked at her attentively.

“ I can't pay you much; I told Nugent I couldn't — six dollars a week is my limit. Perhaps I can do better a little later; I know I can, if business picks up as it ought to. The collapse of the boom rather flattened me, as it did a good many others; but it can't last. The thing's impossible. We've got the land here ” — he waved his hand toward the vegetables and fruit as proof — “ and we've got the climate; people have got to come to us. There can't be any mistake about it; they've got to come.”

“ Six dollars will do very well,” she said, “ for awhile. It will pay my board and lodging; but of course I must have the privilege of looking for another place while I remain here.”

The Dove in the Hawk's Nest

"Oh, you'll want to remain," he said. "And I'll do better by you. Business is bound to pick up; it can't help it."

He got out some addresses and paper, showed her the letters of which he had spoken, and the manifold. Then he stared at the back of her head for a long while as she proceeded with the work. Barbara was not pleased with the place; but she had little liberty of choice now, and she hoped for something better. It was near the lodging-house, which she had found comfortable, and near the restaurant. She would not need to be on the street a great deal, and this lessened the chances of seeing Gilbert Bream. She would have time to think, too, of what she ought to do and where she ought to go.

She did not find much work to do in the office that day and went to her lodging-house early.

"Perhaps I ought to go to Mrs. Kinnison or Mrs. Longley," was her thought, as she turned the matter over and over in her mind that night, referring to San Diego friends of Mrs. Lake, with whom, as governess, she had become acquainted. "But what could I say to them? As friends of Mrs. Lake and her brother, could I tell them how he insulted me;

Barbara

and would they believe me if I did? And how long can I keep this up?—I'm in danger of meeting him every time I go out on the street! I'm afraid I shall have to leave San Diego, even if I don't want to."

She did not see her way clear to leave the city, and this, combined with her great desire to remain, held her and sent her back to Selby Spencer's office. As she entered it on the morning of the third day she found herself face to face with Gilbert Bream, who had stepped in to talk to Spencer, a man he did not like, about some matters of business connected with certain San Diego real estate.

Bream had been searching quietly for Barbara, and had denounced himself furiously and without relenting since the moment of her disappearance. More than that, he had confessed to Mrs. Lake that it was his words and actions which had driven her from the house. This had not been a willing confession. When it was found that Barbara was gone and it seemed that she did not mean to return, some explanation was sought for. A word or two that he let fall caused Mrs. Lake to ask questions; he flushed, and she questioned with such persistence that a portion of the truth was wrung

The Dove in the Hawk's Nest

from him. Mrs. Lake's eyes showed her anger and contempt.

"Gilbert, I didn't think it of you! And she is a married woman!"

"You are jumping to unpleasant conclusions," he urged, while his face reddened.

"The children's governess!" she exclaimed, and left the room.

The recollection of this interview with his sister was painfully clear in the mind of Gilbert Bream as he again found himself face to face with Barbara. She, looking at him in a startled way, thought he intended to speak to her; but he turned with attempted carelessness to Spencer, and during the talk that followed Barbara escaped into Nugent's restaurant.

Spencer, whose evil mind was a sink of impurity, had observed Barbara's sudden confusion, and put his own construction on the matter when he saw her leave the office. He looked at Bream offensively. The talk went on, and taking up his cigar he touched a lighted match to it, all the time eyeing Bream covertly.

"Deuced pretty woman!" he interjected, throwing the match through the open window into the street. "Where'd you know her?"

Bream lost his temper. He had been thun-

Barbara

derstruck on finding Barbara at work in Spencer's office, for, unknown to Barbara, the man had a most unsavory reputation ; now his anger rose at the question and its covert meaning.

"I don't know that it's any of your business," was his curt reply. "It's like you to need to be told that she's a lady!"

"You seem to know her all right," Spencer drawled, pulling at his cigar and giving Bream a comprehensive glance through the smoke.

"What do you mean by that?" Bream asked testily. He was angry with himself and this man and in no mood for trifling. "I know that she is a lady ; and knowing that, I know also that she ought not to be in your office," was his blunt and offensive declaration.

Spencer's whiskey-red face became redder, but he laughed and sauntered toward the door.

"See here," said Bream, rising and following him. "You can't joke with me about this thing, and you may as well know it!"

Spencer turned toward him in sudden anger.

"The hell I can't?" he said. "When did you put on your coat of virtuous whitewash? I saw that you and she understood each other as soon as she entered the office. You're a nice sort of saint to —"

The Dove in the Hawk's Nest

He did not finish the sentence, seeing the look that came into Bream's face.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked.

"Just this," said Bream, his voice trembling. "That woman is too good and pure to be near you; and if you open your face again in that way I'll smash it."

Spencer turned pale under the whiskey red. In his hesitation he laughed and flicked at the ashes of his cigar, while his whitish eyes burned with an angry light.

"You're a —" he began, thinking to offer some sort of apology. Bream misunderstood him, and struck him sharply in the face.

Spencer staggered against the door, and drawing out a handkerchief applied it to his bruised lip. He had not expected a blow, for he had never heard of Bream striking any one, no matter how great the provocation. There was a stain of blood on the handkerchief as he drew it away. The sight of that stain cooled Bream's lava-like temper. He realized suddenly what a fool he had been.

Spencer gave him a look of pretended contempt. For a moment Bream stood in hesitation, then passed into the restaurant.

Barbara was gone.

CHAPTER X

AN ARMED TRUCE

AS Bream walked up the street after leaving the restaurant he pulled his soft hat over his eyes to conceal the flush in his face, and took out a cigar and began to smoke to hide his nervousness.

"It's a queer world," was his thought, "that allows me to go into Spencer's office, and even to consort with him if I wish to, without comment, yet would brand a woman for merely being seen with him. The whole thing is my fault, though; I forced her out of the house and she had to go somewhere. Of course she does n't know anything about the scoundrel's reputation; she'd starve in the streets before going near him if she did."

His face grew thoughtful.

"But I'm no better than Spencer — not so good. I make a pretence of respectability, and he does n't. I claim to be a gentleman! Hell is full of just such gentlemen as I am!

"I will keep away from her," he promised

An Armed Truce

himself as he walked on. "If I should try to see her it would only make matters worse, and I have compromised her enough already. God! why is it that the things a man wants to do are usually the things he can't do, and the things he should n't do are the things he does readily enough? How am I to let her know what sort of man Spencer is? She ought to know. But I was a fool for losing my temper and striking him."

Then he began to see that it was his own conduct toward Barbara more than anything else which had so stirred him against Selby Spencer.

On his arrival at the house he was met by Mrs. Lake, who held a telegram in her hands and looked much disturbed as she came to the door. Apparently she had been watching for his approach.

"I don't know what to do, Gilbert," she said. "Mr. Lake is down with pneumonia and I must go to him on the first train. But what am I to do with the children? I can't trust them with the servants we have, and I can't take them to Denver at this season. The change of climate might kill them."

Bream thought of Barbara. He guessed, too, that his sister's thoughts were turned in the same direction.

Barbara

"If Mrs. Timberly were only here now," she said, "the matter could be arranged easily enough. The children would do as well in her charge as in my own. But I don't know where she is, and if we could find her she probably would refuse to return to the house. There is n't a reliable woman to be had anywhere."

There was a certain eagerness in Bream's face, and he thrust his hands uneasily into his pockets.

"I can tell you where Mrs. Timberly is," he ventured.

Mrs. Lake looked at him quickly.

"She is writing letters or something of the kind in Selby Spencer's office; I discovered her there by chance this morning."

Mrs. Lake's glance became accusing.

"I suppose you're pleased with your work?" she said bitinglly.

"No; I'm ashamed of it."

"I must go to her at once," was her declaration.

"Do!" said Bream, with hearty enthusiasm.

She looked at him again, this time with much earnestness.

"And, Gilbert, if I can induce her to come here?"

An Armed Truce

"I will promise to remain away from the house," he said, his face lighting up. "I will not come near her or near the place. So far as she can know personally I will have no existence."

The anxious lines in the face of Mrs. Lake softened.

"That makes the matter easy, then. I don't see how she can refuse, under those circumstances, for she loves the children."

Bream tried to laugh.

"Yes, I'm the Jonah," he admitted. "Throw me over to the fishes; that will calm the troubled waters. Anything—fix it any way you please."

Mrs. Lake went at once to Spencer's office for the purpose of reasoning Barbara into the belief that it was quite as necessary for her to take charge of the children as it was for Mrs. Lake to return to Denver. But Barbara was not there, and it was with much difficulty that Mrs. Lake traced her to her lodging-house.

"You poor child!" she said, when she at last found Barbara, who was in her room preparing to leave town. "Gilbert told me where you were. He has acted in a beastly way toward you, I am sure; but he is as sorry for it now as I am."

Barbara

She showed Barbara the telegram.

"We just can't get along without you," she insisted. "The children would n't be contented to stay with any one else, even if any one else could be procured, which is quite impossible ; but they would be delighted to stay with you. They have been asking for you constantly, dear, and you really must come. I refuse to take 'no' for an answer."

In spite of this outburst Barbara stood in hesitation. Mrs. Lake understood the nature of the thought that troubled her.

"You will be in supreme command of the servants," she said tactfully. "Gilbert will have rooms at the Pacific Hotel, and will be within easy reach should you at any time need advice or help."

"I do love the children," Barbara admitted.

"I knew you would n't refuse me," said Mrs. Lake persuasively ; then began to argue the matter again, telling Barbara of the sayings of the children and of their comments on her inexplicable absence, using all the adroitness at her command. Mrs. Lake was very much in earnest and felt her need to be great, and so piled up argument and entreaty that Barbara could at last do nothing but capitulate. It is doubtful if she would have surrendered, how-

An Armed Truce

ever, but for the fact that she really loved the Lake children quite as much as they loved her.

Having installed Barbara as temporary mistress of her San Diego residence, Mrs. Lake took the first train for Denver. Barbara's tasks were light, and for several days matters ran along smoothly enough. A telegram came from Mrs. Lake announcing her arrival in Denver, and this was followed by a letter telling of the serious condition of Mr. Lake and filled with endearing terms for Barbara and the children.

One evening Alice came to Barbara complaining of chilliness.

"I feel so funny," she said, "and my throat's just awfully sore. I wonder what makes it?"

"Have you been anywhere — on the street, I mean?"

"Gordon and I went down to Mr. Emerson's candy store, and I bought some gum drops and an orange with the money mamma gave me; but that could n't 'a' made my throat sore, could it?"

She was feverish, her pulse was quick, and she had a wheezing cough. As cases of diphtheria had been reported, Barbara put her to

Barbara

bed and telephoned for the family physician. He came, pronounced the case diphtheria, and ordered the isolation of the patient.

"Where is Mr. Bream?" he asked of Barbara as they sat together by the sick-bed.

"At the Pacific Hotel, I believe," she was forced to answer.

"He ought to be here," was the gruff statement, and stepping to the telephone in an adjacent room he called up the Pacific.

Barbara heard the one-sided conversation that followed, and as she listened she looked into Alice's flushed face and did some serious thinking. Bream answered the doctor's summons with promptness.

The doctor took him into another room and Barbara could hear them discussing the serious aspect of the case and the unfortunate fact of Mrs. Lake's absence.

"We can let the matter rest awhile," she heard the doctor say. "It is impossible to tell yet how this case will turn. It seems to be well in hand just at present."

Then he called to her and she went out to join in the talk. She produced the letter from Mrs. Lake giving details of the condition of the patient in Denver, which the doctor read with grave demeanor.

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"Too bad," he said, as he handed it back. "It's the best we can do, I suppose. I'm hoping we won't need her. But in these cases changes sometimes come very quickly. I will send up a good nurse and will call again in the morning. If there is any marked change let me know."

Bream followed the doctor into the street. Since his meeting with Barbara in Spencer's office he had recovered his mental equilibrium, and the sense of exasperation which had that day possessed him had vanished. He knew that his recall to the house had been forced by circumstances not of Barbara's choosing, and he resolved to conduct himself with tact and consideration. He remained out on the piazza a long time, and when no word of ill came from the sick-room returned to his hotel.

When he met Barbara the next day, remaining after the physician's departure, there was no allusion to the dramatic breaking off of their friendship nor to the incidents which had succeeded it. But in his eyes Barbara had never seemed so beautiful. Her womanly tenderness with the sick child and her utter thoughtlessness of herself set her in a new light. Every hour brought home to him more and more

Barbara

how little he had really known her; how higher than an angel she was above him in all her thoughts and intuitions. He cursed himself for his worse than stupidity; and the feeling that had been at first chiefly admiration for her outward physical charms took now a deeper course, and bursting all bounds flooded his entire being with its rising tide. Not at all times a master of his emotions, he found his position peculiarly difficult. The soft light in Barbara's gray eyes, the burnished shine of her brown hair, the play of her expressive features, as she sat at the bedside watching Alice, impressed him in a new way, and the occasional touch of her hand thrilled him like wine.

Shortly after midnight on one of Alice's worst days he entered the sick-room and insisted unselfishly on relieving the tired nurse until morning. When she had gone he sought to while the time away by reading and by walking softly about the room. But as he sat by the bed, trying to read, the book lay open on his knee more than half the time without presenting to him an intelligible thought, and in his walking he often stopped abstractedly and stood staring into space. When morning dawned a great resolve filled him. It was this: In spite of the past and the present, in spite

An Armed Truce

of everything, he would one day win Barbara Timberly for his wife.

Barbara appeared about daybreak.

"I am sure Alice is very much improved," she said in a hopeful tone, and rewarded him with a smile as she bent over the sick child.

Not until after Mrs. Lake had returned from Denver, and Barbara's need was no longer pressing, did Tilford forward the money he had been able to obtain by selling the ponies and buggy.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE HANDS OF FATE

THE strain of all she had passed through was too much for Barbara. Scarcely was Alice recovered and Mrs. Lake back from Denver when the faithful governess fell ill herself.

As she began to mend, Mr. Lake appeared on the scene, a small, unobtrusive man, whose one thought was business and the getting of gain. It was Barbara's intention to leave the house now, but Mrs. Lake's protest delayed her going. Then almost insensibly and against her judgment Barbara found herself in charge of the children ; they clamored to be with her, and accompanied her when she ventured out into the wholesomely clean streets filled with the pleasant winter sunshine.

The air was heavy with the scent of flowers. And such flowers ! Single daisy plants yards in circumference, starred with hundreds of white blossoms ; calla lilies like small trees, holding white goblets up for a drink of the warm winter

In the Hands of Fate

rains ; geraniums such as she had seen only in hot-houses at that season, growing sturdy of trunk as young saplings and a third as tall as ordinary houses ; roses and pinks, poppies and pansies, all a very riot of color, and all blooming in outdoor freedom under skies so wondrously blue and soft that Barbara could find no fit words of comparison. Though the month was December, there was no shivering fear of cold anywhere.

It was inspiring to breathe such air ; and as Barbara returned from her daily walks with the children she seemed to bring with her something of the all-pervading loveliness of the sky, the earth, and the sea, and her cheeks borrowed a touch of the hue of the winter-blooming roses.

Gilbert Bream was not seen much about the house, but wandered to Los Angeles and other places, then back again, in restlessness of spirit. On his return one day he encountered Barbara as she came back from one of her walks — Ruth swinging a broken doll by one torn leg, Gordon prancing along on a stick horse, Alice bearing sedately a burden of blossoms, and Barbara, grave-eyed, yet smiling, bringing up the rear in this march to the house.

The children began to tell him clamorously

Barbara

of what they had been doing. Barbara smiled and pushed Ruth, with the tattered doll, on before her. Bream had meant to try to enter into conversation with her, but a sense of uneasy condemnation caused him to shower some small pieces of money on the children and beat a hasty retreat. He turned when he had gone some distance and watched Barbara pass up the walk beneath the gum and pepper trees.

Not until they had lost it did the inhabitants of earth's first paradise realize how goodly had been their heritage, and not until he seemed to have lost forever Barbara's sympathetic friendship did Gilbert Bream know the meaning of that loss. An invisible Angel of the Flaming Sword stood in front of the gateway of his Eden.

Bream now began to plan how he could best reveal to Barbara the love that so filled him. It was a difficult thing to plan — this matter of approach to a woman he had offended, whom he had learned to love, and whose moods appeared to be as changeable as the sunshine and cloud of a California winter. He made excuses to visit the house to see Mr. Lake about business affairs. A dozen times on meeting Barbara he was on the point of calling up the subject that lay so near to his heart, but always

In the Hands of Fate

his courage failed him. This may seem strange enough, when the character of the man is taken into consideration; but true love ties the tongue of the orator and throws a mantle of inelegance across the shoulders of Apollo.

Bream gave it up at last; then chance brought him his opportunity and strengthened him to speak his mind. He had come to the house intending to sound his sister on the subject of Barbara's present disposition toward him. He knew he had offended Mrs. Lake when he offended Barbara. Her gentle tones had been a scorpion lash of reproof. She had said at the time that Barbara was a married woman. Bream interpreted this to mean that she was undivorced. He wanted to bring this up again and by questioning learn something more definite.

Mrs. Lake was out, and he stepped into the library. While sitting in a quiet corner, listening to the breeze in the trees and the grind of wheels on the gravelled street, he heard the library door open and a woman's soft tread. Quietly drawing aside the portière that screened him he saw Barbara, her slim figure drawn erect as she reached to an upper shelf for a book. She turned hastily on hearing his movement.

Barbara

"Mrs. Timberly — Barbara —" Bream began, rising to step toward her, his tones impulsive and entreating, "I must speak to you. You misunderstand me wholly; and I beg of you, who are usually so just, to listen to me. I shall detain you but a moment," he promised, "but speak to you I must and will."

She gave him a look of reproach. He refused to heed it.

"I love you, Barbara," he declared passionately. "Can you not see it? Have you not seen it? How could I be near you and see you and not love you!"

Barbara's look changed to one of pain and entreaty.

"Oh, don't! don't!" she gasped, putting up her hand as if to ward off a blow.

Bream was touched and mystified.

"What is it?" he begged. "Why may I not speak to you?"

She looked into his face with a wan smile, like a child who wants pity for its hurt, while acknowledging the justice of it.

"I am rightly punished," she stammered; "but I never thought of—of this! I ought to have informed you from the first that I was—that I am—that—"

She did not know how to tell him that she

In the Hands of Fate

was in doubt whether she were a wife or a widow, but faltered finally :

“ I am not a widow, as you think. That is, I don't know whether my husband is living or dead.”

She could not fail to note the change that swept over the face of Gilbert Bream. To her excited imagination it seemed to accuse her of perfidy.

“ He left me in Kansas,” she explained ; “ he did not desert me, but went away, expecting to return in a few days. I have searched for him — I can't tell you how I have searched for him, everywhere ; in Cripple Creek, for that was his destination when he went away, and here in San Diego ; but I have never heard a word, and I have never been able to find a trace of him, nor met a man who could remember that he had ever seen him, but once. It is impossible for you to understand how it broke my heart, and how — ”

“ Tell me about it,” he said softly and with immeasurable pity in his voice. “ I presumed that your husband was dead, Mrs. Timberly, or that you had separated from him ; I did not know.”

“ It seems to me that he must be dead,” she admitted, her lips trembling, “ but I have refused to yield to that conviction. There

Barbara

are many things to make me feel that he must be dead, besides the fact that his letters stopped suddenly and mysteriously after his arrival in Cripple Creek ; but other evidence seems to indicate that he may be living. I have sifted it all, all ; and I have never been able to accept as a positive conviction that he will not come back to me. More than once while in this house my heart has leaped into my mouth as I saw some one coming up the street who looked like him."

Bream was silent ; then he began to question her. And with a growing strength, as she perceived his sympathy, Barbara gave him a brief account of Bexar's visit to the claim in Kansas, of Roger's departure for Cripple Creek, and of her vain search. He listened calmly, with an incisive question or a pertinent comment now and then, and the details of the pitiful story increased his love rather than diminished it. He was silent again when she had finished, then said :

"I cannot retract the declaration I made awhile ago, Mrs. Timberly, and I would not if I could. You have my sympathy ; and I must ask you to believe me, when I say to you that if I can help you in any way I shall be only too glad to do so. Can you tell me

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just the month and the year in which your husband went to Cripple Creek?"

As he put the question there was a look in Bream's face that seemed inexplicable. Not until long afterward did Barbara comprehend its significance.

"Two years ago last May," she answered, never dreaming that he had a well-grounded reason for making the inquiry.

"And you say it was this mining claim which Joseph Bexar gave you that drew him there?"

"Yes; it was an unfortunate gift, as it turned out, and brought us anything but the wealth and happiness that Bexar hoped."

Bream asked some more questions, then drew a deep sigh, like one rousing from sleep.

"Forgive me if I have hurt you, Mrs. Timberly," he said, with a tenderness that was almost womanly. "We do not always know what we are doing."

She thought he referred to the words which had been so painful to her, and could not know that he was thinking of something else altogether. She was glad to escape from the library, and when he ceased his questions she took the book she had come to get and retreated to her room upstairs.

CHAPTER XII

LOOKING BACKWARD

GILBERT BREAM was much pained by that interview, which had brought developments of which he had not dreamed. The mining claim that had first been Bexar's and had been transferred by him to Roger and Barbara Timberly, a transfer of which he had no previous knowledge, was now Bream's own property and had developed into a heavy yielder of high-grade ore. More than that, Bream was satisfied that he had himself seen Roger Timberly in the Placer Hotel in Cripple Creek; and it was he who had contested Bexar's claim.

Of all this he had said nothing to Barbara, but had patiently, and with self-accusation, listened to her story, questioning her until all the facts were brought out. He wanted time to think, and returned to the quiet of the alcove, where in mental review he passed over all the scenes of those eventful days.

"Yes, it must have been Timberly," he said to himself. "It could n't have been any one

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else ; and she was there in Cripple Creek while I was pushing that contest, and I never knew it. I may have seen her there, for she says she visited the claim ; but I could n't have seen her ; I could never have passed that face unnoticed, and I could never have forgotten it."

Recollections of all the incidents of those days came to him with disturbing clearness. He recalled the fact that two young men, one of whom he now believed to have been Roger Timberly, had entered the office of the Placer Hotel together and had attracted his attention by the eagerness with which they were discussing the Mancos country and the reported discoveries of gold on the San Juan.

"It was San Juan instead of San Diego," was his conclusion. "That seems to be certain. Jack Nixon's memory was at fault, and he confounded the old cliff dwellings of the Mancos with the ruined mission churches of Southern California. That sent Barbara here, though, and I am glad of that, for if she had sought for her husband in the San Juan region likely I should never have met her or known of her. The question now is, what am I to do? No doubt she has a picture of her husband — of the man who was her husband, but I'm not ready to ask to see it yet. I

Barbara

must think this thing over. The whole affair looks to be a series of remarkable coincidences, with myself the chief villain in the play."

He began to recall the details of the conversation of the two young men, and recollected with especial clearness the feverish eagerness with which Roger had spoken of the cliff dwellings. Roger had been more interested apparently in that subject than in the reputed discoveries of gold on the San Juan. To Bream, those old ruins, all that was left to tell the story of a bygone race, were not of remarkable significance, but to a man of Roger's temperament and quick imagination they had been wonderfully suggestive. He recalled how Roger had recited with much earnestness some pertinent verses in Swinburnian measure from a poem by Stanley Wood, of Denver, then current in Western newspapers, and which Bream himself remembered :

"In the sad Southwest, in the mystical Sunland,
Far from the toil and the turmoil of gain ;
Hid in the heart of the only — the one land
Beloved of the Sun, and bereft of the rain ;
The one weird land where the wild winds blowing,
Sweep with a wail o'er the plains of the dead,
A ruin, ancient beyond all knowing,
Rears its head.

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- “On the cañon’s side, in the ample hollow,
That the keen winds carved in ages past,
The Castle walls, like the nest of a swallow,
Have clung and have crumbled to this at last.
The ages since man’s foot has rested
Within these walls no man may know ;
For here the fierce gray eagle nested
Long ago.
- “In that haunted Castle — it must be haunted,
For men have lived here, and men have died,
And maidens loved, and lovers daunted,
Have hoped and feared, have laughed and sighed —
In that haunted Castle the dust has drifted,
But the eagles only may hope to see
What shattered Shrines and what Altars rifted,
There may be.
- “Those castled cliffs they made their dwelling,
They lived and loved, they fought and fell ;
No faint, far voice comes to us telling
More than those crumbling walls can tell.
They lived their life, their fate fulfilling,
Then drew their last faint, faltering breath,
Their hearts, congealed, clutched by the chilling
Hand of Death.
- “Dismantled towers, and turrets broken,
Like grim and war-worn braves who keep
A silent guard, with grief unspoken,
Watch o’er the graves by the Hoven-weep.
The nameless graves of a race forgotten ;
Whose deeds, whose words, whose fate are one
With the mist, long ages past begotten,
Of the Sun.”

Barbara

Roger's companion had been more interested in the gold fields of the San Juan, apparently, for time and again he had brought Roger back to the discussion of that subject; and Bream recalled the emphasis with which this young man had stated his belief that there were richer mines in the valley of the San Juan and the Mancos country than had yet been opened in the whole Rocky Mountain region. He had exhibited some samples of ore, too, which he said had been brought from there by a friend and which had turned out some wonderful assays.

As Bream thought thus over the matter, the scene in the Placer Hotel rose before him with such distinctness that he seemed to be witnessing it again. Roger and the young man were seated near a window across the room from him, and were silhouetted against a background of hill and aspen slope, the window framing them in like a picture. At first Bream's opinion had been that Roger's companion was something of a confidence man, who was trying to "work" Roger for whatever amount he could, but as the talk went on Bream had come to the conclusion that the young man meant all that he said. He was too much in earnest to lend color to any other interpretation.

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Once it had been on Bream's tongue to interrupt their talk and ask them if they were not aware that the Utes were threatening an outbreak and that the region discussed was considered just then to be perilous ground. On second thought, however, he had felt sure they could not be ignorant of this, as it was being commented on daily in the newspapers.

Barbara had told him the story of Bexar's claim, but in that hotel office in Cripple Creek Bream had heard something of it long before. Roger—he was sure now the young man could have been none other than Roger Timberly—took a legal-looking document from his pocket and gave it to his companion to read. They talked of the document and of the claim which it mentioned. It was Bexar's claim, and Roger had given his companion a half-caricatured description of that eccentric fellow, Joseph Bexar, who had been miner and prospector and no one knew what else, and who, visiting Roger in Kansas, had given to him in return for board and kindness and a small consideration this claim. Roger had visited the claim, too, but had not been impressed with its apparent value, and so had not as yet made a filing of this transfer from Bexar to himself, though the time in which a

Barbara

contest could be put on the claim for failure to do the specified work required by the government lacked but a day or two of expiration.

Bream had become more interested in this claim in Cripple Creek than in all the mythical wealth of the San Juan and the Mancos, which, with its ruined cliff dwellings, seemed to him then, and still seemed to him, somewhat of a fabulous land, rather than one in which there were real treasures of gold and silver. There was nothing fabulous about the gold deposits of Cripple Creek, however, as he had already assured himself; and as he listened, it had occurred to him that this claim of Bexar's might be worth looking into. As its present claimant appeared not to think highly of it, Bream decided that he would examine it, and promptly begin a contest for it if the time limit was permitted to expire. "Business" had always been "business" with Gilbert Bream, and he knew, besides, that if the claim had any real value some one else would contest it if he did not.

On that evening, now more than two years and a half ago, another man — a miner named Sam Swainson — had sat at the desk near Gilbert Bream and had overheard that conversation. Swainson had seemed to be half asleep

Looking Backward

at the time, though after events had proved conclusively that he was very much awake and fully alive to every word that was uttered.

At the close of their long talk, Roger Timberly and his new-found friend had gone out of the hotel and Bream had not seen them since. He had visited Bexar's claim, however, and when an examination had shown him that it was likely to turn out well, he had filed a contest against Bexar at the expiration of the time limit; and that contest had been before the land office when Barbara came to Cripple Creek. The "claim" was now a profitable piece of property and had already turned in to Bream a snug profit above the cost of operation.

Turning from these thoughts, as he sat recalling the matter in the alcove of the library, Bream's mind went back to Sam Swainson. Swainson had been a drunken, worthless fellow, who was never able to hold for any length of time a valuable claim even when he secured one, because of his drinking habits. It had been Swainson's intention to put a contest against the claim; but one of his periodic sprees had supervened and permitted Bream to get ahead of him without any difficulty. Swainson had met Bream in the street one day, after discovering what his drunken spree had cost

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him, and had reproached Bream with sharp dealing.

"You're a damned sc-coundrel!" Swainson had hiccoughed, shaking his fist under Bream's nose and tottering uneasily on his tipsy legs. "You're a (hic) d-damned scoundrel! You (hic) let them men go out into the Mancos c- (hic) country without any warnin', when you knew the d-d- (hic) danger; and if they lose their lives you're (hic) 'sponsible for it. That's (hic) what you are — 'sponsible for it! And you c-call y'shelf an honest (hic) man and a gen'elmun. Hell's fu-full of sh- (hic) shuch gen'elmun as you are (hic), Gilbert Bream. Just (hic) s-sloppin' over full of 'em."

These were stinging words, even though they had come from a drunken man of the type of Sam Swainson. The sting of them came back to Gilbert Bream now, as he sat in the quiet alcove thinking the matter over. Of course Swainson's anger had been natural, for he had been defeated in his desire to get the claim; nevertheless, Bream could not entirely escape the feeling that he had been culpable in not giving a warning to the strangers, for, though the Utes had made no raid nor slain any prospectors, so far as the public knew, the desolate deserts beyond the Mancos were full

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of unknown perils for which those young men could not have been prepared.

"I can't see even yet that it was any of my business!" Bream remarked aloud in the quiet of the library, unwittingly speaking the words as if he were standing before the bloated, accusing face of Sam Swainson. But even while he thus sought to reassure himself Barbara's pitiable expression as she told her story rose before him to convince him that under all circumstances every man is to some extent the keeper of his brother.

Bream rose from his seat in the alcove and began to walk nervously about the room, as was his frequent custom when considering perplexing questions.

"Ought I to make this revelation to Barbara?" was the question that troubled him. "If I do," was his thought, "she will leave San Diego and plunge without due consideration into the wilderness of the San Juan in her hopeless search. Of course Roger Timberly is dead. I don't think he deserted her, but he is dead. There are hundreds of ways in which he might have lost his life out there. His crazy zeal to explore those old cliff houses would lead him to scale heights that no sane white man would attempt. Or he may have

Barbara

been murdered by the Utes, who are always ugly and treacherous, and are thrown into a rage whenever a prospector invades the country over which they fancy they have jurisdiction. Or he may have been slain by wild animals, or starved to death. He was a fool for ever venturing into such a country, when he so lacked experience, and he has paid for his folly with his life. It would be worse than a will-o'-the-wisp chase for Barbara to go there on such an insane quest, and at this season of the year. It would simply kill her. She might as well commit suicide and be done with it; but that is just what she will do if I tell her about Roger."

In all the turmoil of contending thought Gilbert Bream never for a moment forgot his great love for Barbara Timberly. He saw that in her present frame of mind, with Roger's fate uncertain, he could not induce her to listen willingly to any suggestion of love and marriage. It seemed to him, therefore, that the first thing to be done was to determine the nature of Roger's fate and produce some evidence that he was no longer living. If it could be shown that he was dead, or had basely abandoned her, Bream would have something solid on which to stand; but until that was done,

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any foundation he might build for his hopes would be no better than sinking sand, in constant danger of being washed away by some tide of feeling.

Certain of this, and sure of the wisdom of keeping his knowledge to himself, Bream began to lay plans for a systematic search for Roger Timberly. The fact that Barbara had failed did not discourage him, for he had resources and means of information of which she was not possessed. In business matters Bream never carried his heart on his sleeve ; few successful business men do ; and he now planned to treat this proposed search for Roger as a business matter, notwithstanding the fact that it was connected so strongly with his consuming love for Barbara.

When he had thought the matter out thus carefully he left the library and the house. He did not want Barbara to think that he was moping or chafing in seclusion ; still less did he wish to meet his sister just then.

The next day two things occurred which seemed to Bream almost providential. Mr. Lake, whose health was not yet re-established, asked him if he would not make a trip to Denver to look after some matters of business that he felt to be in jeopardy without competent

Barbara

personal supervision; and he chanced to hear Mrs. Lake and Barbara commenting on Roger Timberly's photograph, which Barbara had brought into Mrs. Lake's sitting-room.

Bream's interest was so stirred by the knowledge that such a photograph was in existence that he determined to have a look at it; and, as he did not wish Barbara to know of his contemplated search, he likewise desired to get a look at this picture without her knowledge.

Fortune favored him, for both Barbara and Mrs. Lake soon afterward left the house with the children, and he knew they had gone out for the afternoon. They were hardly out of sight before he had the photograph in his hand. He could not mistake it, for on the back it bore the name of "R. H. Timberly," and when he looked at the face portrayed he recognized it at once as that of the young man who had sat by the window of the office in the Placer Hotel exhibiting to his companion Bexar's relinquishment.

"They will not be back for hours," was his thought, as he studied the face in the photograph. "I ought to have a copy of this. I am working for Barbara's peace of mind as much as I am for my own. I must prove to her that this man is dead. She refuses to rec-

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ognize that fact, though it is patent to every one else. This picture would help me wonderfully in securing that proof. I must have a copy of it. It looks mean not to tell her that I want it and why I want it, but under the circumstances that would be worse than folly."

Thus reasoning, Bream did not find it difficult to convince himself that Barbara's real interests justified him in taking the photograph for a little while; so he slipped it into his pocket and took his way to a photographer, an alert man with bulbous eyes, who, being painfully myopic, stared hard at the picture.

"Ever see that man here in San Diego?" Bream inquired.

"No," said the photographer; "I was just examining the work. The artist who posed this man did n't understand his business!"

"Oh!" said Bream, with a sense of relief; then, a moment later: "You are certain you never saw the face anywhere? He seems to have disappeared mysteriously, and I am trying to find out what has become of him."

"Never saw him! Friend of yours, I suppose?"

Bream dodged an answer by asking if negatives could be taken at once, stating that he

Barbara

wanted copies both of the photograph and of the signature.

"Take 'em this minute for you," was the prompt answer, "but it's a pity the fellow was n't posed better. Photography will never become the art it should be so long as its ranks hold such bunglers."

Negatives were taken; and long before Barbara and Mrs. Lake returned to the house Roger Timberly's photograph reposed where Barbara had left it.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SEARCH FOR ROGER TIMBERLY

GILBERT BREAM started for Denver and Cripple Creek as soon as copies of the photograph and signature were ready for him, entering upon his self-imposed task with much certainty of success. His resources were ample for the work ; and he was, moreover, acquainted thoroughly with the Rocky Mountain mining regions, having a knowledge that extended not only to the configuration and resources of the country, but embraced reliable and confidential correspondents in almost every mining camp.

He was glad to leave San Diego for a time, that he might begin this work, even though it involved a separation from Barbara. Lake was glad to have him go, that the business at Denver might have competent supervision ; and Bream had a feeling that for reasons which solely concerned Barbara and himself Mrs. Lake was also pleased to have him forsake his usual winter haunts for a time. As to

Barbara

what Barbara's feelings were on the subject he could only guess, for her face and manner betrayed nothing, but he hoped she was not among those who rejoiced at seeing him depart.

So he went forth, confident, sure that Roger Timberly was dead, never admitting for a moment there was any likelihood that he might be found. He expected to secure proofs of Roger's death, with which he could return to San Diego, and thus have a solid structure on which to stand while he waged a contest for Barbara's affections. He did not doubt the final result of this effort any more than he doubted the result of the search for the man who had gone out from his Kansas home and then had disappeared so strangely. Bream was out of the Slough of Despond, he had passed the lions, and he fancied that straight before him lay the shining pathway to the beautiful city of his desires.

In spite of all this it was not pleasant to leave the summer-in-winter of Southern California for the frigid atmosphere of the high plateaus and mountains of the Centennial State. Nothing but confident hope and an assured sense that this was a thing which must be done before he could expect to win Barbara could

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have induced Bream to leave San Diego for Colorado at that season. His first sight of the snow lying among the pines and spread out over the lava slopes of the San Francisco mountains was not pleasing to him, and this disagreeable impression was intensified by the cold, shining, white drifts, wind-torn winding sheets for all the sensitive plant life of the plains, which covered the country between the Raton Pass and Denver.

He visited Denver first, where he straightened out the business complications that had worried Lake; then went by rail to Divide and by stage to Cripple Creek, thus covering much of the country over which Barbara had passed when she sought the great gold camp in her search for Roger. The slender, leafless aspens, bending under the northern gales, were now but mourning wind-harps singing of the vanished summer, and writing elegies with wavering tops against the low, leaden wall of the sky. Everywhere the snow was piled in almost impassable drifts, through which the laboring horses could hardly draw the stage. Pines and piñons, firs and spruces, bowed their heads mournfully under the crushing weight; all the wind-blown slopes were glittering white, blindingly so whenever the sun shone, and all

Barbara

the valleys and depressions and time-worn wrinkles of the hills were smoothed out and covered over by the snow.

Bream was in no mood to enjoy this change of scenery ; though, in spite of all, it was very beautiful in its chilling way, and some of the views of snow-clad peaks, set on fire now and then by the winter sunshine, were gloriously sublime. He was in a hurry to reach Cripple Creek, and the snow clogged the stage road and dragged the journey out to a torturing length. Sometimes, in the worst places, the passengers dismounted and walked, to relieve the struggling horses, and this plodding along over the snow-buried trail tried Bream's temper.

Cripple Creek was reached at last, however, and Bream was ready to begin the work that had brought him thither. He had thought it best to begin in Cripple Creek, for that was the place where Roger Timberly had last been seen. He believed he could unearth evidence there which Barbara had not been able to reach ; and, having chosen the Placer Hotel as the place where he should enter on his task, he sent for Jack Nixon.

Cripple Creek was chameleon-like in its changes, but there was no observable alteration in the appearance of Jack Nixon since Bream

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had seen him last. His boots and clothing were as coarse and clayed, his hands as hard and rough, his face as tanned and his eyes as keen as ever. Though Bream had been greeted cordially and even effusively by Mrs. Gibbs, he had been careful to say nothing to her of the mission which had brought him to Cripple Creek; and now, that he might have privacy for his interview with Nixon, he led the way to his room.

"Back ag'in," said Nixon, depositing his hat on the floor and dropping into the chair which Bream pointed out. "I reckon you ain't havin' such weather as this down in San Diego? Acquaintance o' mine went down there last fall, but 't ain't likely that you've seen her!"

"What was her name?" asked Bream, fumbling with his watch chain, for he felt sure that Nixon's reference was to Barbara.

"Timberly," said Jack. "Mrs. Timberly. Fine woman, too, and purty as a gold nugget. She lost her husband; he run away from her, I reckon, or mebbe died. It hurt her like the devil, that did. I felt sorry fer her. I found some old letters in the mine one day and give 'em to her. They was from him; then she showed me his picture, and I recklected that I'd seen the son-of-a-gun at this here hotel,

Barbara

and I told her so, and that he'd talked of going to San Diego; and then she cut out fer that place fast as trains could carry her. But I reckon you did n't run across her down there?"

Gilbert Bream looked steadfastly into the tanned face and keen eyes. He seemed to be considering the matter.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I became acquainted with her down there. She is now the governess of my sister's children, in fact. And that is why I sent for you, Jack. She told me her story, you see; and I thought, while I was in Cripple Creek, I'd paw over matters a little and would perhaps be able to tumble to something that she missed."

He was adapting his style of speech to that of the young mine laborer.

"You might tell me the story, just as you told it to her," he urged.

Jack Nixon was glad to do anything that might assist Barbara Timberly, so, while Bream listened attentively, he went over the story again, giving all the details.

"And you have n't found anything more, or heard anything since?"

"Not a thing. I don't reckon that the feller was square with her myself, though I

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would n't tell her so. A chap can't well drop out of sight even here in Cripple Creek without somebody knowin' it. It's my opinion that he give her the dead cold shake. If he did n't, if he just went away from here and got lost or somethin' happened to him afterward, why did n't he write to her before goin'? There's where the screw is loose in the whole thing, ye see; but she did n't see it, and of course I would n't tell her. It's a durned shame, too, fer she's a mighty fine woman!"

"She is indeed," said Bream, with such earnestness that Jack Nixon opened his eyes a trifle. Bream observed his mistake and corrected it by saying:

"I felt sorry for her, just as you did, Jack, when she told me her story, and I want to see if I can find out what has become of this husband of hers, if he's living."

Nixon's keen eyes swept the face before him. Unselfish devotion to the interests of another had not been a characteristic of Gilbert Bream during his stay in Cripple Creek, and Nixon was not ready to credit him with anything of the kind now.

"And marry her, if she's a widder!" he said bluntly. "It's been stickin' in my craw that that's what you're up to!"

Barbara

Bream frowned and showed his displeasure by pulling at his mustache.

"Don't lose yourself in wild guesses, Jack! I'm working on the square in this thing, and if you knew me better you'd know it. When you sent Mrs. Timberly to San Diego you sent her on a wild-goose chase. I heard those same men talking in the hotel here, and it was the San Juan and the Mancos country they were speaking about."

Nixon forgot his displeasure in the thought that he had perhaps made a mistake.

"Might 'a' been," he admitted. "It was San Something-or-other. But they was talk-in' about old houses — mission churches, she thought."

"They were talking about the cliff dwellings in the Mancos country and about the gold finds on the San Juan."

"Likely you're right," said Nixon, after some thought, "and I was off in my guess. 'Tain't a very healthy country fer a man out in them mountains and deserts; but I can't make it anything else but that he pulled up his picket pin and vamoosed the home range. If he did n't, why did n't he write to her? Any sort of a man would 'a' done that, if he keered fer his wife."

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"That's what we're to find out, Jack,— why he left Cripple Creek in that way, without writing to her, and what has become of him. In thinking the thing over, it came to me that perhaps you could help me in looking the matter up. You can make some inquiries among the miners, you see, and report to me if you learn anything. The miners are shifting about a good deal, with new men coming in all the time, and some of them may have heard of this man Timberly. If there are any men in the Amazon who have come from the San Juan country or the Mancos, it might pay you to question them."

He rose and went to his valise and took from it one of the copies of Roger Timberly's photograph.

"I had these made from the picture Mrs. Timberly had with her," he explained, "to assist me in this work. Take this one to show to the men you may happen to talk with about the matter. If any of them have seen him, it will help in the identification. I didn't tell her that I intended to make these inquiries, and if I find nothing, likely I shan't say anything to her about it. It would only revive her hopes and her memories of her husband, you see; and if nothing comes of it, she

Barbara

would feel worse than ever because of the failure. So, in making your inquiries, you'll need to be a little careful about what you say, for there is no use in worrying her with the knowledge of what we are trying to do."

Jack Nixon felt that this was a sensible and commendable course ; and though he had small hope that anything would come of the search, he put the photograph in his pocket, amended his opinion of Gilbert Bream, and went away to do what he could to help in the investigation.

In addition to this interview with Jack Nixon, Bream examined the tunnel in the Amazon mine where the packet of letters had been turned up by Nixon's spade ; then paid a visit to Matthews, in the office of the " Daily Clipper." A man from Telluride was installed in the editorial chair which Barbara had vacated ; and, while explaining to Matthews the object of his search and what had induced him to make it, using in substance the statements that had so satisfied Jack Nixon, Bream showed the photograph to the new editor, for Telluride is not far from the borders of the Mancos valley. But the editor had never seen the man whose face was pictured in the photograph, and Matthews had no new information.

"Glad to know that Mrs. Timberly is doing

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well, and glad to hear from her," said Matthews, tapping the arm of his swivel chair with the butt end of his blue pencil. "Capable woman, that! Head as full of knowledge as a cyclopedia, and brains to beat the band. She ought to be a good judge, and it was her opinion that her husband was as smart as a steel trap; if he was smarter than she is, he must have been a wonder. But if he left her he was a fool, and if he lost himself in the Mancos he was an idiot."

Bream took the picture, placed it in his pocket and prepared to go. The visit had yielded nothing.

"If I can help you in any way!" said Matthews. "I reckon it would n't do any good to publish anything in the 'Clipper.' She did that when she first came here, but it was only a waste of space and crowded out good advertisements. I don't think you'll ever hear from the fellow. Let's see! It will soon be three years since he went away. He's dead all right, I guess; or if he ain't, he never intends to come back. If he left her, it's my opinion that it was good riddance to bad rubbish. I wish you luck, though."

"I haven't any great hopes myself," said Bream, "but I had to make a trip to Colorado,

Barbara

you see, and I felt it to be my duty to find out what I could for her, if there is anything to be found out. If you hear anything, send word to me at the Placer Hotel. I shall stop there while I'm in the town."

Quitting the "Clipper" office after this unprofitable talk, Bream tramped through the heavy snow out to the mine which had been Bexar's claim. He had no hope that he could gain any information of Roger Timberly there, but the mine was now his property and he had not seen it for some time. As he approached it he looked it over,—the tall shaft, with the mound of dump behind it showing brown and yellow through the white snow, the little ore-carts on the snowed-in track, the smoke and steam from the hoisting engine rising white and cold in the frosty air above the cheap buildings and spreading out, fan-like, against the whiter background of hills and mountains. That mine had been the claim which had lured Roger Timberly to Cripple Creek, and had sent Barbara finally to San Diego and to her acquaintance with Gilbert Bream.

"I will make it right with her," he said, in self-communion, as he stood in the snow, buttoned to the chin in his heavy fur overcoat, his mittened hands thrust deep into his pockets.

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“Whatever happens, I will make it right with her about this mine. If she should ever become my wife, the property can stand in her name, and if that should never be!” — he checked himself with a spasmodic twitch — “if that should never be, I will transfer the mine to her and give her a check for every cent of its earnings; yes, I’ll do that, even if Timberly is living and she should go back to him as his wife. The property is hers! But I’m glad that I made that contest and so got possession of it. If Swainson had beaten me, it would have been gone from her forever. It does seem sometimes as though there must be a Providence that is guiding everything; else how did it happen that I should be the one to contest that claim and should be here now in this search? Of course Timberly is dead; I’m sure of that, and sooner or later I’ll have the proofs. And then —”

He clinched his mittened hands resting in the warm fur pockets, set his jaw firmly, and walked into the nearest building, where the big hoisting drum was booming and whirring, the ore and dump buckets rising and falling, and the steaming engine panting under the strain of its heavy labor.

As Bream returned from this visit to the

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mine, trudging thoughtfully back through the heavy snow to the Placer Hotel in the face of an icy wind that swept down from Pike's Peak, he stumbled against Sam Swainson. The latter, who had descended rapidly in the scale of degradation, looked disreputable to the last degree, and his bearded face was flushed with drink. Bream sought to avoid a meeting, but Swainson lurched toward him with an insulting leer. He swayed for a moment, clutched at a lamp post, then straightened up and looked Bream in the face.

"Don' know me, eh?" he questioned. "Well, I know-er-know you all right. You're Gilbert Bream."

He surveyed the fur coat and the warm close-fitting cap, and hiccoughed tipsily.

"Dressed in sealskins and silks, eh? — stickin' (hic) feathers in your hair an' flyin' high, ain't you? but there ain't no great difference (hic) 'tween us! If you had n't got ahead o' me in that mine I might 'a' been flyin' 'z high 'z you."

"Get out of my way!" Bream commanded.

Swainson clung to the lamp post and straightened himself again.

"No, I don't — not on yer life! I'm as good as you, and you're a damned cheatin'

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sc-scoundrel ! That 's what you are, Gilbert Bream, a damned cheatin' (hic) scoundrel ! You le' that feller go 'way, wis'out (hic) tellin' him ; tha's what you did — wis'out (hic) tellin' him ; an' then you (hic) jumped his claim. Oh, I know you — I 've got y-your character down 's fine 's a gnat's heel ! ”

He swayed forward and shook his puffy forefinger in Bream's face, his bloated features working with hatred and his red eyes glittering.

“Get out of my way, or I'll knock you down, you loafer !” Bream shouted, beside himself with rage.

“No, I won't — not till I (hic) tell you jes' what I shink o' you, Gilbert Bream. You're a damned scoundrel ! You jumped that claim, an' you let 'im go wis'out (hic) tellin' him. I've got that chalked down ag'in ye, Gilbert Bream — I have. Now you're up, an' I'm (hic) down. But th' world ain't ended yit, an' ever-shing comes” — he swayed tipsily — “comes t' th' man 't waits.”

Bream would listen to no more, but brushed Swainson aside and strode on to the hotel, much disgusted and more disquieted than he was willing to own. Not that he feared the vaporings of a man like Swainson, but the bitter accusations stung in a strange way, and he could not

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make up his mind fully that some of them were not deserved. However, he cast the incident aside as not worthy of thought, and succeeded in forgetting the unpleasant qualms after awhile, and so went on with his search.

This search he conducted with a system that was characteristic and an energy that was unflagging. He practically organized a bureau of inquiry which covered the entire mining West. He sent copies of the photograph and signature to correspondents in every city and mining camp; he had men everywhere looking for Roger Timberly, under whatever name or disguise the latter might be living; and in addition he employed the best detectives of Denver to trace out every clue that was in the remotest degree promising. The work was conducted quietly, too; and under all its disguises it was a search for Roger Timberly dead rather than for Roger Timberly living. Bream believed that Roger was dead, and he had come for the proofs. In addition to all this, he wrote to a discreet lawyer in Paragon, believing it possible that if Roger were living he might have made a visit to the land claim in Kansas, and he employed another discreet man to trace Joseph Bexar.

For a time the result seemed to show

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that Roger Timberly was dead, and that he had gone to his mysterious death without leaving so much as a word or a hint behind him to tell of his fate. If he had not done that, the indications were that he had departed from the country entirely, perhaps for the purpose of starting life anew in some remote place. Bream was loath to believe this, however, and almost succeeded in convincing himself beyond a doubt that Roger was dead. Bexar was dead; of that fact he secured positive knowledge; and Bexar had left no heirs behind him, so that neither in law nor in equity nor on any grounds whatever could any righteous claim for the mine come from that source.

Only one thing concerning Roger Timberly seemed to be established beyond peradventure. Neither Roger nor his companion, granting that he left Cripple Creek with a companion, had been killed by the Utes. It could hardly be doubted that if any such killing had occurred it would have become known to the authorities; for, through means of reservations and hard-riding pistoling troopers, "Poor Lo" is "rounded up" and hunted down in a manner that most effectively discourages scalp-taking and makes it hard for him to hide his evil deeds. There were innumerable ways, how-

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ever, aside from the desires of murderous Indians, in which Roger Timberly might have met his end. Men were being dynamited out of existence daily through accidents, were tumbling to their deaths in bottomless cañons, were being buried in land slides and in avalanches of snow, and crushed by falling rocks in the bowels of deep mines. Such casualties were so common that little note was taken of them, and often the names of the men were not even mentioned in the newspapers.

Bream received many letters from Mrs. Lake detailing the doings of the Lake family, letters which contained much gossip information concerning Barbara. These served to keep him in touch with life in San Diego, and wafted to him so much of its genial atmosphere that the icy winds of Cripple Creek went more severely to his marrow. He answered the letters with brotherly promptness, chiefly because of their many references to Barbara, though he sent not a word to her directly.

As he sat one evening in his room at the Placer Hotel, contemplating the reports that had come from his correspondents and assuring himself that his work was ended and there was no more for him to do, Mrs. Gibbs tapped on the door and thrust in a letter which had been

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brought up to the hotel with others from the post office. As he glanced at the envelope he saw that the letter was from his correspondent in the San Juan country, a section to which he had devoted much attention, but up to that time without result. Nevertheless, as he tore open the envelope a strange trembling seized him.

"I think I have found your man!" were the first words that caught his eyes as he unfolded the letter.

He drew in his breath with a gasp of surprise and trepidation and proceeded to read the communication :

"He is in Feather Bow Camp, in the mountains back of Silverton. I have n't been able to get up there because of the heavy snows, but I'm dead sure that I have struck the trail at last. His description tallies exactly with the photograph and with what you wrote me. He came from the Mancos country, over the mountain trail from Ouray, and went up to Feather Bow with the rest of the gang last fall. He is a little off in his head, I think, from what I heard about him, or else he is playing a game, which it seems to me is more likely. He told contradictory stories when he was in Silverton. One man tells me that he first claimed that he was from Kansas and that he said his name was Timberlake; but after that, for

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some reason, he seems to have changed his name to Iselin or Iceland Snow. 'Ice' and 'Snow' are good, when you come to think of the conditions at Feather Bow. The name is a fake, sure. It's my opinion that he told the man Timberly, instead of Timberlake; and, to hide his identity, perhaps because he may have killed the man he set out with from Cripple Creek, he changed his name. Feather Bow is a good place to hide in, if a man feels that it stands him in hand to hide awhile. To make the story short: I've dug all round the roots of the matter, and I know I have found your man — this fellow Timberlake, or Iselin Snow, at Feather Bow. You can't get at him though, there, at this season of the year."

When he read the letter through, Bream sat staring at it as if in a daze. Had he found Roger Timberly at last? However much he had tried to conceal it from himself, he knew now that he did not want to find him, if he were living. If Timberly were dead he would be glad to find him, to get the proofs of his death.

"Swainson is right; I must be a villain!" he said to himself as he stared at the letter. "But I refuse to believe that this man is Roger Timberly. Timberlake is n't Timberly, if it does sound something like it; and the fact that the fellow changed his name is no sign that he

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is the man I want, even if he does resemble the photograph and the description. A similarity of looks is common enough. No, this fellow can't be Roger Timberly; I refuse to credit it."

He crushed the letter in his hand and threw it into the waste basket; only to take it out, smooth out the wrinkles and read it again. The more he read, the more was his belief shaken that the man could not be Timberly.

"I'll find out!" he said, with hard determination, putting the letter in its envelope for future reference. "I'll find out. I can go to Feather Bow, even if this fool says that he can't. I must go there. I'd struggle through snows to the North Pole, if it were necessary, to settle this question. I'll see this man and prove—God! what if he should be Roger Timberly?"

Having half risen from his chair in his excitement, he sank back, weak and trembling. He took out the letter and read it again. His resolve became iron.

"I'll go to Feather Bow!" he said aloud. "I'll go at once!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE MAN AT FEATHER BOW

THE next morning the stage that wallowed out of Cripple Creek bore Gilbert Bream through the deep snows to Cañon City. The grade stakes for an extension of the Denver and Rio Grande railway to the now famous gold camp showed here and there, where the wind had blown the snow from the ridges; but this same wind had so heaped the drifts in the hollows that, where they were not cemented by an admixture of sand and earth into an adamantine firmness, they were a white smother, through which it seemed hopeless for the horses to try to go.

So journeying, by stage to Cañon City, and thence by rail through tunnelling snow-sheds and across volcanic wastes, where the eruptive raggedness of the landscape was softened by the white garments of winter, he came at last to Silverton, ringed in by its mountains in the heart of silver San Juan. Even to a man so used to the mountains as Gilbert Bream this snowy trip would have been an interesting bit

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of experience but for the fact that he could not keep his mind off the letter which had sent him thus scurrying along. Hence he missed much of the beauty of the little narrow-gauge route over the wild mountains by Toltec Gorge, and the peaceful loveliness of the rich pasture lands of Los Pinos Valley, where the painted tepees of the Southern Utes gave a dash of barbaric color to the quiet landscape. But even his worried introspection could not render him wholly oblivious of the stupendous grandeur of the great gorge lying between Durango and Silverton,—the wonderful Cañon of Las Animas, or Rio Las Animas del Perdidás, as the old Spaniards called it. Here, a thousand feet above the bed of the tortuous river, on a track as crooked as the trail of a snake, where in blasting out the roadbed the workmen were often compelled to “hang on by their eyebrows,” the little train roared and whirled northward, swaying perilously over deep pine-filled crevices, screaming past granite walls banded and streaked in all the colors of the rainbow, by sheer precipices of naked stone, all aglitter with fretted frost-work, and on and on amid scenes that have few counterparts outside of our own great mountain regions.

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"If the train should leave the track here, not a soul would live to tell the tale!" thought Bream, as he looked into the dizzy depths from the car window — the reflection of every one who has ever made the railway journey up this wild cañon.

He found Silverton snow-bound and impossible of access except by way of the railroad. It was a white bowl in the hollow of the mountains, with the town in its centre showing like the lines of coffee grounds in the cup from which the wrinkled fortune-teller forecasts the future for the credulous.

Feather Bow was a few miles from Silverton, far above the timber line, on a gorge-cut mountain. To it, during the summer days, everything, including the coal consumed in the furnaces, was "packed" by "jack train," the said "jack train" consisting of big mules that were as sure-footed as mountain goats. For six months of each year the miners of Feather Bow were cut off from the world by howling snow-storms and deadly avalanches, with the exception of perhaps once a month, when a man slipped down to the town on skis for the mail and climbed back with it by infinite effort to the eagle-like aerie. The imprisoned miners would have their mail when it could be

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obtained, though life itself was risked in the attempt to get it.

To this place had come Gilbert Bream, with the intention of reaching Feather Bow, knowing in advance all the difficulties and the awful hazard; to this place and to face these perils, for love of a woman, who, if the writer of the letter had guessed correctly, would be lost to him, as he felt, forever. So much will love do for a man when it has stormed and captured the citadel of his heart.

As soon as he set foot in the town Bream found his way to a hotel and began to make inquiries concerning the possibility of reaching Feather Bow. The landlord shook his head.

"Better not risk it," he said. "There are no trails and the storms have been heavy. We got the tail end of a big snow-slide here the other day. Some of it came right down into the town. Two men were killed, and old Dashiell's house out there under the mountain was carried away as if it had been a chip. Money could n't hire me to try it. Tim Anderson came down yesterday for the mail, but I don't think he will try to go back for awhile; he'll be a big fool if he does. The mail will keep."

"Came down from Feather Bow?" was

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Bream's eager question. "Where will I find this man Anderson?"

"Up about the post office likely. But I don't think he'll try to go back right away. I don't reckon he's any more anxious to commit suicide than some other people. For my part, I don't know how he got down. Must have let all holds go and fell."

"The weather is n't threatening," Bream urged. "He will not wait for another storm to come, and if he goes I can go. I think I'll look him up."

The landlord led the way to the door and pointed to a purple line over the northern mountain wall—a line that looked almost black against the wonderful azure of the sky.

"See that? I've lived here for some time, and that line always means trouble. It may not come to-day nor to-morrow, but it will come. Dead sure sign of a storm that is, and a good one. If you'll take my advice you won't try to make it to Feather Bow until after you've seen what that storm is going to be. Better wait till spring; that's the safest way, and the only sensible one, to my notion."

However, Gilbert Bream was not a man to be deterred by the threat of a snow-storm. He had been in snow-storms and had fought

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blinding blizzards. He did not despise them; he knew their terrors and their perils too well for that. But he could not delay in this matter. "Wait till spring!" He could not think of it.

So he sought Tim Anderson, who had come down from Feather Bow for the mail. Bream found him at last in a saloon warming himself with a hot drink. Anderson was a man of middle height, narrow shouldered but sinewy, with a face like old parchment, and hard knuckly hands whose fingers were stiffened by much use of the pick and shovel. He was garbed for severe weather, in a great fur coat with the hair side out, and a cap of badger skins. The big coat flapped open in front and the thick collar was turned back. On the saloon bar lay his snow goggles and in a corner of the room stood his long skis. This man had seen the one who was referred to in the letter—the man who was possibly Roger Timberly himself! That was Bream's thought, as he beheld Anderson before the bar.

"I'd like a few words with you," said Bream, "in private, if you have nothing else to do just now."

Anderson had put down his glass and stood talking with the barkeeper.

"Sure!" he said, giving Bream a keen

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glance. Having never seen Bream before he wondered what the latter could want with him, but followed him into a small side room, where were some tables and chairs.

"I want to go up to Feather Bow," said Bream, plunging at once into his subject. "There is a man up there, I believe, by the name of Iselin or Iceland Snow. You know him, I suppose?"

"Sure! Queer cuss, too!" remarked Anderson, flinging his cap on the table and elevating his feet to the same position, while he tipped back his chair. "He'll do to tie to, though, when it comes to work, and he's got as much sand in his craw as a game rooster. He's a good deal of an old bull buffalo, when it comes to solitary — never says much, ye see; but when the cave-in happened a month ago in the new tunnel and Lon Hopkins got pinned under the rock with his leg broke, Snow he went in there when there was n't any of the rest of us dared do it for fear the whole danged tunnel would come down on us, and got Hopkins out. The boys swear by the feller now, if he is a bit queer in his cupalaw."

"That's the man I want to see," said Bream, feeling for the photograph in his pocket. "How old is he?"

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Anderson gave him a searching glance.

"You ain't wantin' him for any trouble?" he asked suspiciously. "'Cause if you air, I reckon you'd better not try to go up there!"

"Nothing of the kind," Bream assured. "I'm looking for a man who has been supposed to be dead for a good while. It will mean a good deal to his wife if he can be found. I am acting in her interests."

He produced the photograph, and briefly told the story.

"Is that the man?" he asked, scarcely able to conceal his uneasiness as Anderson studied the picture.

"What was the name of this feller?" Anderson inquired, giving Bream another suspicious glance.

"Timberly. I've heard that this man Snow once called himself Timberlake. That's a good deal like it, you see. You say the fellow is queer, and perhaps he has changed his name. It's done sometimes, you know, in these mountains."

"Whatever he's done, or whatever his name may be, the boys would n't let any man take him out of camp. They'd fight first."

Bream's heart gave an unpleasant leap.

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"He is the same man, then, whose face you see there in the photograph!"

"Snow wears a beard," said Anderson, as if desiring to hedge. "I could n't say that this is the same feller."

"But you think he is?"

"I dunno; I could n't say. A beard makes a big change in a man. What was the color of this feller's eyes and hair?"

Bream gave him the description, gathered from his recollection of Roger as he had seen him in the office of the Placer Hotel.

"'Bout the same," admitted Anderson, still studying the picture. "But I could n't tell, 'count of the beard. But you can't git up there to see him now!"

He pushed the photograph across the table to Bream as if that settled it.

"But I am going up there!" Bream declared with resolution. "This is a very important matter. I've undertaken to find out if this man is the one I'm looking for. I mean no harm to him, none whatever; and you'll be doing him a service as well as myself by assisting me in the matter if you can. You're going back to Feather Bow, I suppose? I'm told that you came down for the mail."

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"See here," said Anderson, "I'll take this picture up to camp, and if our man up there is the feller you want I'll send word to you. I'm lookin' for a storm before I git through, and if it strikes, you'll be a mighty sight better off in the town than up on the mountain."

"I'm going with you," Bream declared with dogged persistence. "This thing is so important that it must be settled without delay. I came to Silverton for the purpose of going on to Feather Bow to see this man, and now that I'm here I shall make the trip. I'd like to go with you, for the sake of company, and help, if it should be needed; but whether I go with you or go alone, I'm going just the same. I'm used to mountain climbing and to cold weather, and I can make it through, if any man can."

Anderson shifted his legs on the table, looked steadily at Bream, then thrust his hand into his overcoat pocket and took out a plug of black tobacco, from which he bit a big chew.

"Might's well try the raffle with me, then," he said reflectively. "The boys up there won't stand no foolishness, though! I'm goin' to Feather Bow 'fore the storm strikes, if I kin, and if you want to resk it with me, why, I

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reckon 't ain't my call to say that you shan't. But you'll find it tough goin', and if that storm should hit us we'd freeze like pa'tridges. Got any snowshoes?"

"I'll get a pair," said Bream, "and whatever else is necessary. I'll look up something to eat first, and I think I'd better pack some grub, for use in case we should need it. We can make it up to Feather Bow before dark, I suppose, if we start early. When will you be ready?"

"Jist gittin' ready; dropped in hyer for something warm first. I'll leave the post office inside of an hour."

When Tim Anderson, mail bag on shoulder, skis on his feet and snow goggles over his eyes, left the Silverton post office, Gilbert Bream similarly accoutred, except that the bag on his back contained eatables, was at his side. The sunshine on the glittering snow-fields was like fire, and would soon have produced snow-blindness but for the goggles.

"'T ain't to say a trail," commented Anderson, as they left the town and the valley behind them and began to climb the mountain, "and this sun will make the top of the snow slushy. Mebbe it'll keep back the storm, though."

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The purplish line pointed out by the landlord had not grown in size. It still hung over the crest of the mountain, a threatening portent, that was all. The storm it was supposed to herald might not come for days, or it might fling itself down the white slopes like a mad beast within the hour. The promise for the afternoon was good, however, and Bream was hopeful of reaching the camp before night. He wanted to see that man who might be Roger Timberly or might be some one else; and this burning desire gave such strength and energy to his limbs that Anderson, hardy and used to such work as he was, found this stranger able to outdo him at his best pace.

Gilbert Bream was sufficiently acquainted with Barbara's character to make him dread the result if he should discover that Roger Timberly was living in Feather Bow, under whatever name. Bream had come to know that her loyalty to her husband was of a kind that dies hard and with fierce fighting. Nothing but the most convincing proofs of Roger's utter baseness would serve to drive her from him, and Bream was not sure that even that would. He had much to think about, therefore, as he tramped on over the snow at the side of the Feather Bow mail-carrier. The

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work was particularly hard on Bream, who had not put his foot in a ski strap for many months, but his anxiety to know the truth made him scorn the toil.

"There air fellers who says 't that is handsome," remarked Anderson, seating himself on a snow-bank for a bit of rest when they had trudged on until near mid-afternoon. He dropped the mail bag from his back and flirited his mittened hand in a semicircular sweep.

Around them were the high-piled mountains, pine-set and snow-sifted; and, drifting upward in the clear, cold air, columns of smoke showed here and there the location of mining camps. Silverton lay at their feet, so clearly revealed and seemingly so near that one might have thought it possible to toss a stone into the midst of it.

"We'll get through without a storm," said Bream. "That blue line has drawn back into the north. I suppose this fellow with the wintry name will be found right in the camp?"

"Yep; right there in the midst of good friends. I heerd once that he'd said his name was Timberlake, or somethin' of that sort, but he never was a feller to ask questions of.

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Seein' 't you're goin' through, I don't mind sayin' that I think he's your man. Would n't be the first feller that's run away from a woman! Mebbe she made it too hot for him. I've knowed the like. Some women air hell."

Then he tossed the mail bag again to his shoulders, thrust his staff into the now crisping snow, and began to toil on again, with Bream at his side.

On the summit of a high divide, from which Silverton could not be seen, where the sinking sun changed the trackless snow-fields to fiery crimson, to rose tints and purple, with the high peaks, like white-robed vestals, dazzlingly crowned in silver and gold, and the tall, shining, minaretted spires fretting the gorgeous dome of the sky, Gilbert Bream came in sight of Feather Bow. He felt a strange thrill as he looked at it — an insignificant mining camp, a blot and blur in the heart of those leagues of silence and grandeur. The sun, descending behind it, seemed to lay down for his feet a pathway of cloth of gold. Did that pathway lead to the destruction of his hopes?

"Storm petered out!" said Anderson, breaking the silence. "When we left town, though, I would n't 'a' bet doughnuts to dollars that

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it would n't git us. But we're all right now."

Bream scarcely heard him. He was thinking of this man who possibly was Roger Timberly. Then they set their skis in the shining pathway and labored on toward the camp. When still some distance away they were seen, and a number of men swarmed out of the tiny houses. Some of these men hurried toward them.

"Is my man with them?" Bream asked. He could not see well because of the flare of the red sunlight.

The answer was a negative.

"He'll be pilin' out purty soon, though, 'less he's down in the mine. They're gin'erly hungrier fer their mail when I git back than they air fer their supper."

Bream felt almost relieved. He feared the revelation that might come when he stood face to face with the man he had journeyed so far to see. Yet he was anxious for that revelation. The suspense was terrible. The sooner it was ended the better, he thought, not able to resist the hope that it would end as he wished.

"Am I hoping that Roger Timberly is dead?" he asked himself in self-accusation. "No, I won't let myself hope that; only I

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shall feel relieved when the question is settled one way or the other."

He had forgotten the fatigue of the tiresome journey, and skied with the eagerness of a schoolboy down the slope that now dipped toward the camp. The sun, dropping behind the far peaks, mellowed the strong lights on the encircling slopes, washing them out to browns and drabs and pearl grays, except where the high spires still shone ruddy and flame-colored.

More men came out of the tiny houses, and Bream repeated his question. The foremost men, mounted on skis, were approaching rapidly.

"In the mine, I reckon," said Anderson in response, "er thinks 't there ain't any letter fer him nohow. I don't remembèr that he ever got a letter since he's been in the camp, come to think of it. A feller ain't likely to take any excitin' interest in a lottery when he's dead shore from the start that it ain't got no prizes fer him. He'd have his ears up like a sage rabbit, though, I reckon, if he knowed you was comin' fer him."

A little later they met the foremost men, who stared at Bream and began to inquire about the mail.

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"Mr. Bream, from Denver, up hyer on a little bizness," said Anderson, characteristically and with an excess of caution, as he introduced Bream comprehensively to the motley mob. "He 'lowed he could make it with me, and I was n't 'bjectin' to company, ye see. Geewhiz! this tarnal mail bag weighs about a ton; I'll be as glad as if I'd struck a gold nugget when I kin hand it over to the postmaster."

"Is there anything for me?" asked a quiet, little man with an anxious face, plucking at Anderson's sleeve. "My oldest girl, down in Durango, was desprit sick last time I heerd, ye know."

"Yes, there's a letter fer you, Bald'in. I looked over the pile in the post office at Silverton, and seen one with your name on it. If you'd tell your folks to write on postal cards I could git the news to ye quicker; now you'll have to wait till the postmaster sifts through the mail. But he'll be quick about it."

Baldwin dropped back, anxious and troubled. That letter, which had been in the Silverton post office nearly a month, might convey the news of his daughter's restoration to health or it might tell of her death while he had been

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imprisoned in the snow-bound camp of Feather Bow.

Other men pushed up with similar questions; and Anderson, who seemed to know the contents of the mail bag by heart, was able in nearly every instance to tell a man whether there was any mail for him or not.

“Good thing the storm held off,” he commented, as he moved on surrounded by this anxious bodyguard. “If it’d broke while I was in Silverton, I could n’t ’a’ got in fer a week, and if it’d smashed into us on the way up hyer likely you’d got your letters when you dug us out of the snow in the spring.”

Thus he talked as he moved toward the camp and the post office, cheerful withal, making light of the peril that lay in wait for him like a crouching lion on the trackless slopes every time he ventured down to Silverton for the scanty mail for Feather Bow. He was a hero in his way, and a philosopher, and was quite unaware that he was either.

“Point him out to me if he comes into the post office,” Bream contrived to whisper as he passed into the little building with Anderson. “If he has changed much I may not be able to recognize him, you see.”

“Oh, you’ll know him!” said Anderson;

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then marched forward and slammed the mail bag on the floor.

The postmaster was waiting for it, pounced on it, drew it behind the railing where there was a desk with some lettered pigeon holes, and with quick nervous movements unlocked it and poured out the contents. A half-dozen men who had been previously sworn in as assistants grabbed the letters and began to call off the names.

"This is fer Piute Pete," was shouted, an assistant holding up a letter that was addressed in a dainty feminine hand to "Mr. Peter Lindgrin."

"And here's one fer Peg-leg Bill!"

"Two; no, three, for Cap'n Sargent," another called.

"Ah, there, Joey! you've got a letter from yer sister down in Santy Fe; and here's a billy doo for Sam Jackson."

Jackson came forward and took his letter with flushing face; it was from his sweetheart, and he had not heard from her for a whole month.

"A letter and a paper for Tom Jenkins — you're gittin' literary, Jenkins!"

"There ought to have been a magazine," said Jenkins, as he took his mail.

The Man at Feather Bow

"I left it down to town," said the mail carrier. "There was a lot of magazines down there and I could n't pack 'em; the trail was bad and I was afraid of the storm. Git 'em fer ye the next time I go, though."

In the midst of this noise and hurly-burly Gilbert Bream stood in a corner to be out of the way of the struggling men, and scanned the door closely. Suddenly he felt some one nudge him in the side and turned to find Anderson at his elbow.

"He's comin'," said Anderson, not finding it necessary in the midst of that uproar to lower his voice. "I've been listenin', and I heerd him cough outside; he's kind o' thin chested, and when he comes up out o' the mine the cold air sort of ketches his wind sometimes. He'll come in, I reckon; so keep yer eye on the door."

Bream felt the hot blood mounting to his face, and his limbs trembled; but he braced himself with an effort, and, putting his hand on the wall, waited for the appearance of—whom?

Then a man came in—a thin-chested man, with sunken, gray eyes, a face sallow but intelligent, and dressed in ordinary miner's garb. Bream caught his breath and reeled, the blood

Barbara

bounding in his veins. The hair, the eyes, the face, the general appearance, were the same; but—the man was not Roger Timberly!

The resemblance was striking, almost startling in some respects; however, Bream had seen Roger, he had studied the photograph to assist his memory, he was able to recall Roger's looks with almost photographic accuracy; and when his glance fell on this man he saw that the man was a total stranger. Until that supreme moment Bream had not really known how great was his fear that the man at Feather Bow whom he had come to seek was Timberly. Now, when he discovered how far from the truth was the suggestion, the feeling that rose from the depths of his soul was one of exultation. He could not repress it, though he hated himself for it.

"Your man?" asked the mail carrier, when Bream did not speak.

"No!" said Bream, with a sense of relief. "I never saw him before."

"That's good. He looks like the picture, though, 'cept for the beard; and he tallies to your description. I was dead shore he was your man."

The voice of the mail carrier expressed also a sense of relief. He had not fully accepted

The Man at Feather Bow

Bream's story as to the nature of his errand, but had held a lingering suspicion that something of possible peril to this man was hid back of it.

"I'll interduce him to ye d'reckly," Anderson volunteered. "Then ye kin talk with him. But if he ain't the man, I reckon 't he don't know any more about him than I do."

CHAPTER XV

IN THE GRIP OF THE BLIZZARD

THERE was a slight snowfall that night, and further threat of a severe storm ; and these conditions continuing, Gilbert Bream was detained at Feather Bow for three days, and it might have been better for him if he had been willing to remain there longer. His mind was relieved of the intense strain concerning the mysterious man who had once called himself Timberlake and was now known as Iselin Snow ; but this did not lessen his desire to leave the camp. It increased it, if anything. The search for Roger Timberly had resulted in total failure up to that time, and Bream believed that no better results awaited further search. There was no reason, therefore, why he should not return to San Diego.

Cooped thus in the camp, Bream had abundant time for thought, and the result was a certainty of belief that Roger was dead. He had not only sought for Roger, but had sought as well for Roger's companion, the man who had been with him in the office of the Placer Hotel,

In the Grip of the Blizzard

and who was presumed to have accompanied him when he left Cripple Creek. As far as could be ascertained, both had vanished from the face of the earth ; and when Bream reflected on the unerring skill with which officers of the law track fugitives to the remotest corners of the world, and how he and all his assistants had failed so signally in their efforts to discover or trace Roger and his companion, he was driven irresistibly to the conclusion that Roger was dead.

During those three days in Feather Bow Bream tried to be stoically philosophical, and sought to interest himself in the mining operations that engrossed the time and attention of the men of the camp. In spite of it all he chafed like a hooded falcon. Neither the whirring, steam-driven windlass that dropped him into the heart of the mountain, the silver that was being unearthed, nor the contemplation of anything else in Feather Bow, could give him a moment of contentment.

On the morning of the fourth day Bream announced his intention of returning to Silver-ton. It was a foolhardy determination, the men of Feather Bow insisted ; for, though the day opened in blinding brightness, suggestive banks of thin vapor looped themselves in ser-

Barbara

pentine folds round the brows of the mountains, and the blue line beyond the northern range was advanced a trifle. Weather-wise miners, among them Tim Anderson, the mail carrier, told Bream that a storm was brewing, and that it was likely to break at any time. Since the snowfall there was not the hint of a trail to guide him over and down the white wastes, and if the storm should strike or a snow-slip occur his chances of life would not be worth counting. But Bream was not deterred. For three days the miners had talked in this manner, causing him the loss of precious time. However, he did not himself like the portents, and delayed his departure until noon.

Then, as the predicted storm had not appeared, he turned his back on Feather Bow, and with his skis on his feet and a bundle of food on his back, he set off across the snow toward the divide, where the descent of the mountains began. He was attired for severe weather, and if the storm continued to hang off he knew that he could make the downward journey to Silverton without trouble. It lightened his heart to be in motion, and the feeling of restless impatience, that had driven him fairly frantic while in Feather Bow, vanished.

In the Grip of the Blizzard

Of course his thoughts were of Barbara ; and he almost laughed at the notion that any one should have fancied for a moment that the rough miner of Feather Bow could be Roger Timberly. Roger was dead ; he knew that, now. He no longer consented to the thought which had sometimes been his, that Roger, in leaving Barbara on their lonely claim in Kansas, had deliberately deserted her. She was so charming a woman — and Bream could not doubt she had been equally charming as a wife — that he found it impossible to believe that any man could have abandoned her in so cowardly a manner.

After Bream crossed the divide the sky became gradually overcast. Then a fierce wind bore down from the northwest, a wind that picked up the sand-like particles of frozen snow and threshed them noisily against and over the scrubby piñons, which lifted their gnarled arms in the precipitous places and fought lustily with the advancing gale. This snow, which in its flintiness resembled powdered glass, stung and lacerated Bream whenever by reason of the character of the ground he was forced to face it. But he was descending at a promising pace and hoped the storm would not be severe.

Barbara

Due caution would have urged Bream to attempt to return at this time, even in the teeth of the wind and the flying snow; but the thought of being cooped for a week or more, perhaps for a month, in so forlorn a place as Feather Bow, drove him on down the mountain. There were times when he was forced to pick his way with much care and to make wide detours, all of which caused loss of valuable time and tried his patience. He could not long doubt, however, that the storm was increasing in severity. The fierce north-west wind brought with it a deadly drop in the temperature. Even through his thick fur coat and in spite of his exertions he felt the chill striking to his bones.

Stopping in the lee of a rocky eminence he cleared the rime from his face and eyes and tried to look through the flying snow. He had heard a sound that was unpleasantly suggestive. It was a dull detonation, smothered and apparently far away; but he knew the meaning of it. Somewhere out in that white smother there had been a snow-slide. As he tried vainly to pierce the snow he saw with the inward eye and by the aid of memory the white mountain crest above him, over which, not so very long before, he had seen the snow blowing

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in a shining veil. He had not looked on that sight without something of foreboding. From the high plateaus which lay back of that mountain wall the wind was eating away the snow, whirling it forward and pouring it over the rim of the mountain as the veil of a waterfall is poured over the rim of a precipice. Reason told him that the sifting cascade had increased rather than diminished since he looked on it. In all probability it was now a small Niagara of wind-torn ice dust instead of the shining veil-like cascade he had beheld. What the effect of its superimposed weight on the vast overladen snow-fields might be, the dull booming roar had told him.

"I don't like that," he thought, as he listened for a possible repetition of the detonating crash. "It would n't be pleasant to be caught in a snow-slide."

He was unwilling to admit that it would mean death to him in all probability, though he knew it well. Gilbert Bream was no coward. Inevitable death, under ordinary circumstances, he could have faced as bravely as any man; but now, with those thoughts of Barbara and of the future, he hesitated to word the suggestion even in his mind.

"It's a good thing that the way lies down-

Barbara

ward," he said to himself, as he moved out of his shelter. "I should be bewildered and lost, even with the wind at my back, if I were on a level; but I can't make much of a mistake in direction so long as I keep going down hill. A trail would be of no use now, even if there were one. But Silverton lies at the foot of this mountain, and surely I can't miss it."

Once beyond the protection of the rocky eminence, with the snow-filled wind roaring madly about him and threatening to tear him from his footing, he thrust his stout alpenstock into the snow, guided himself as carefully as possible round such obstructions as he could see; then, realizing that the storm was growing steadily worse and that a genuine blizzard was upon him, he shot downward from point to point with reckless daring, taking perilous chasms with his skis much as the trained hunter takes dangerous ditches and walls. And ever the gale smote him with fiercer mien.

In spite of Bream's exertions he began to feel soon the deadly effect of the intense cold. The wind grew wilder and wilder, and tore at him like a savage and relentless beast. The flying snow-dust filled his face and his eyes,



In the Grip of the Blizzard

and stung with its million needles of ice. Nevertheless, he sturdily kept the wind on his shoulder and his skis pointed downward, knowing that there was no safety for him on the mountain, and that if he found shelter it must be somewhere in the valley below. Silverton he had not sighted since leaving Feather Bow, and soon even the rocks and the trees that sped past him were blotted from his sight.

Yet he did not for a moment lose hope. He had been in storms and blizzards before, though never in one so wild as this. He knew his peril well, but he knew likewise his strength and his unbending determination. There was stern stuff in Gilbert Bream, and an iron-like courage with which he was not often credited even by those who knew him best.

With the storm growing worse and the cold more intense, he finally thrust a couple of biscuits into his pockets and cast away the bag of food. Knowing that no greater danger could await him than that which now closed so icily about him, he set his alpenstock to act as a rudder and slipped blindly downward.

"There is no help for it," he assured himself, trying to see through the snow-scud that filled his face and made his breathing difficult.

Barbara

"I shall die here. I seem to have been descending for hours. Silverton can't be far away now."

The cold seemed to be congealing the blood in his veins and closing about his heart. His limbs and arms were losing the power of sensation. His feet were leaden and heavy and his fingers frozen and stiff. Thick boots, thick mittens, and fur coat had lost their ability to keep him warm. He knew that he was freezing, and that if he did not find shelter and protection soon he would tumble forward into some deep drift and rise no more.

A minute, two minutes, five minutes, went by in this mad race. He crouched low and peered into the wall of snow, but saw nothing. He crossed gorges and rifts in the mountain, but they were now snow-filled, and he knew it not. More than once he scraped against trees and boulders. He knew only that every moment was filled with deadly peril; but he could not stop, for the peril from which he was speeding was as great as anything that could lie in his path. The sensation was like that of flying, and as he swept on, the very thrill of it seemed to warm the blood that so short a time before had been congealing.

"I ought to bring up somewhere pretty

In the Grip of the Blizzard

soon, at this rate!" was his thought; "and I'm certainly growing warmer."

Then he was startled by the conviction that this apparent warmth was but an indication that he was freezing — that it meant the cessation of sensation and the benumbing of his faculties.

"I can make it, though!" he assured himself. "Silverton can't be very far away now."

The thought had hardly crossed his mind when he crashed heavily into some object he had been unable to see, and was hurled into a drift, bleeding and almost senseless. He roused himself with an effort, to find that one of his skis was gone and that the other had been snapped in two and rendered useless. He made the discovery with a sense of despair, feeling that without his skis he was lost. However, he struggled to his feet, standing hip deep in the drift, and tried to go on.

As he moved forward his mittened hands struck against a round object directly in front of him. He could hardly tell what it was. At first he thought it must be the prostrate trunk of a tree and tried to wallow round it; then he discovered that there were similar round objects above and below the one he had touched. He passed his hands over them.

Barbara

His chilled heart leaped when he comprehended the nature of the discovery thus made. He had struck against a wall of logs — perhaps against the side of a house, and that house might be inhabited! It might mean warmth, fire, and food — life itself!

Reeling in the snow, Bream began to shout as loud as he could. There was no answer. He hammered against the hard logs with his stiff hands. He would have battered the walls with his fists, but could not bend his fingers; neither could he lift his feet out of the snow and kick against the wall. Again and again he shouted; then began to crawl along the wall, hoping against hope that he could find a door. The hope was doomed to disappointment. There was no house before him, as he discovered when he had crawled to the end of the logs; there was not even a comfortable shelter. The logs had once constituted the walls of a shed, which was now roofless and filled with snow.

The thought that he might be even within the very borders of Silverton caused Bream to lift his voice once more. He was too dulled to reason that if he were in the heart of Silverton the scream of the gale would drown his feeble efforts. When he found that no house

In the Grip of the Blizzard

could be expected to open hospitable doors to welcome and shelter him, he tried to crawl back up the slope in the teeth of the wind in search of the lost ski, dimly hoping that if he could but find it he might splice the one that was broken and so proceed down the mountain; and when his frozen hands did not find it, he slipped down the slope again, felt his way to a position behind the broken wall, and sought to save himself from death by drawing his coat closer. His mind was becoming clouded with fancies, but only at intervals did he realize this.

"It's been terribly cold, but it's warmer in here," he muttered and mumbled, as he tried to look with filming eyes through the swirl of the storm. He tried to rouse himself, and was aware that he felt sleepy. "Perhaps I'm freezing," he mumbled again, "for I've heard that people seem to get warmer when they begin to freeze; but I don't think I'm freezing yet. I'm certainly warmer and more comfortable, and it's the shelter of this wall. That wind was awful! It don't strike so hard here. No doubt it's cosey enough in San Diego. A regular summer land. I wonder what Barbara is doing! Perhaps she's strolling along Coronado Beach. I should like to

Barbara

be with her. I wonder what she would say if I should die here ! ”

It was useless to stare longer through the flying snow, and he dropped his head on his breast. He became even more comfortable after that, and fancied that he was in the warmth of Mrs. Lake's drawing-room, and that Barbara was reading Tennyson to him. He seemed to see her face ; there was a love light in it, and that love light was for him ; and he fancied that he heard her voice, sweeter than music. He saw only the snow blur if he saw anything, and he heard only the mad scream of the blizzard.

After a time there came to Bream a feeling that he was being rescued from some awful peril, and that Barbara's arms were about his neck and that her tears fell on his face. This part of the dream — for it was of the nature of a dream — was so pleasant that he wished it might go on forever.

A sudden waking from it brought to him such agony that he screamed aloud. Mocking devils seemed now to be dancing about him, devils who took delight in freezing him with icicles and smothering him in snow. They pommelled him, too, and yelled at him and took excruciating pleasure in rubbing the skin

In the Grip of the Blizzard

from his bleeding limbs. He tried to shake them off, to fight them, to spit his contempt and hate upon them ; but as he struggled they threw him down again and again, still hammering him with icicles, deluging him with snow, and beating him until the torture became unbearable. He began to understand but slowly that he was in a room, and that the demons were two honest-looking young fellows who were exerting themselves to the utmost to bring him back to life.

In his flying descent down the mountain Gilbert Bream had struck against an old and broken woodshed at the corner of the Dunbar cabin, just outside of the borders of Silverton. There he was found in a freezing condition by Asa Dunbar, who, with a rope about his waist to guide him back to the house, — the other end of the rope being attached to the door knob, — had ventured out into the storm to get a load of fuel for the dying fire. In feeling his way along the shed to the snow-covered woodpile Asa had stumbled over the stiffening figure of Gilbert Bream. Recognizing instantly the serious character of Bream's condition and being unable to carry him alone, he had returned to the house for help, and the two brothers had dragged Bream in, instead of the load of wood

Barbara

that Asa had gone to fetch; and they were now using every means which their knowledge of such cases suggested to restore him and save life and limb from the terrible effects of the cold.

"Oh! oh! don't!" Bream begged. "You're killing me. I can't stand it."

"We've got to do a little killin' to make you alive again," said Bob Dunbar, as his hard hands seemed to scrape the skin in flakes from Bream's body. "You was nighabout a goner, I'm tellin' you. If Asa had n't tumbled over you out there when he did you'd shore took your supper in Kingdom Come."

"Asa" was rubbing Bream's arms and hands with snow.

"Don't! don't!" screamed the tortured man, as the life current began to circulate in the frosted members.

He scarcely knew what he was saying. His mind was still clouded, and though he knew now that he was in the hands of men instead of devils, he felt that he wanted them to let him alone. He had been quite warm and comfortable, and it seemed fiendish in any one to treat him with such cruelty.

But the Dunbar boys were inexorable, and continued their efforts until they began to feel

In the Grip of the Blizzard

that he was safe. His condition was so serious, however, that they framed a stretcher, and in a lull of the storm bore him through the flying snow into the town that he might have the attention of a competent physician.

Before this was done Bream had fallen into a restless delirium, in which he raved constantly of the devils of the cold and called on Barbara to save him, starting up from the bed and from the stretcher now and then with a shriek.

"He is in a bad way," said the doctor, when he had made an examination. "His mind is affected; and as for that right foot, I'm afraid that if he lives it will have to come off. If he has any folks they ought to be sent for."

A search was made for information, and Mrs. Lake's latest letter to Bream was found in his inner breast pocket; and as he could give no account of himself nor make his wishes known, the physician telegraphed a statement of his condition to the address in San Diego, making special mention of the fact that the unfortunate man was calling constantly for Barbara. The physician's natural supposition was that Barbara was Bream's wife.

Out of a hell of painful and troubled semi-consciousness Gilbert Bream awoke one morning to find Barbara sitting at his bedside. He

Barbara

could hardly be sure that he saw aright. Her presence irradiated the place, transforming it from an abode of pain into a paradise of delight.

“Is it really you?” he asked, in affecting appeal; and she, rising quickly, came and bent over him.

CHAPTER XVI

DEFEAT

BREAM was puzzled to account for Barbara's presence in the room. He had no conception of how long a time had elapsed since he had been brought there, and he did not know that he had called for Barbara through all the long hours of his delirium. On Barbara's face was an unmistakable flush as she stooped above him, but whether of pain or pleasure Bream could not tell. However, her voice was gentle and tender, and her eyes expressed kindly sympathy. He even thought there was a trace of tears in them, but he put this aside as an improbable fancy.

"Would you like to see Mrs. Lake?" she asked.

It was a sensible disappointment to Gilbert Bream to know that Mrs. Lake was there.

"I suppose so," he answered, almost wearily, the eager light dying out of his eyes. "You came with Mrs. Lake? I must have been lying here longer than I thought. Let's see!

Barbara

How was I hurt? Oh, yes! I got caught in the blizzard while coming down the mountain from Feather Bow."

The look of weariness increased; and Barbara, alarmed by it, hastened from the room, returning presently with Mrs. Lake, who threw herself wildly upon Bream, kissed him, and then began to chafe affectionately the frost-bitten fingers.

"We have been so alarmed about you, Gilbert," she said, with a sisterly devotion that was almost motherly. "But you will soon be well now, the doctor says. Only you must keep very quiet!"

"I suppose he wired you?" Bream inquired, his gaze wandering toward Barbara.

Mrs. Lake answered:

"Yes; and we came right away. But you must n't talk, you know. That's a dear, good fellow!"

She kissed him again, on the week-old growth of dark beard that disfigured his face, and it required no stretch of fancy to see the tears in her eyes and to hear them in her shaking voice.

"I don't understand it all yet," he said. "How did I —"

"I should n't try to talk, Gilbert, if I were

Defeat

you," Mrs. Lake urged. "You were found in a freezing condition and brought here. That is enough to know now, is n't it? When you are stronger I will tell you all about it — all that we know."

Bream tried to be content with this. He felt very tired, and he still had unpleasant memories of the demons who had tormented him.

"Barbara will sit by you awhile, if you like," said Mrs. Lake, noting how his gaze wandered constantly to the face of the one woman who had become all the world to him.

"Thank you," he said feebly, with a slight flush of the bearded cheeks. "Any way! Perhaps I don't need any one now. I must be much better than I have been?"

"Oh, ever so much better! You'll soon be quite well now, the doctor says. But you must n't talk, and you must not worry yourself, Gilbert."

She put her fingers gently across his lips; then seeing the look of resignation and submission she went away, leaving Barbara sitting by the bed.

As Bream's faculties grew clearer he began to wonder dreamily how he could account satisfactorily for his presence in Silverton and the

Barbara

condition in which he had been found. He would have been more puzzled if he had been given an inkling of the things he had uttered and the confessions he had made during his moments of unconsciousness. If he had but known that in his ravings of Barbara he had told of his search for Roger Timberly and had confessed wildly to her and to Mrs. Lake the depth of his love and devotion — had but known that he had laid bare the innermost secrets of his heart and that he had begged Barbara to forgive him and to believe that he loved her sincerely, — if he had known all these things he would have been abashed and covered with confusion. Yet so strong was his love, that it is likely he would have been driven by the very knowledge of his confessions to re-avow their truth.

On all these points, however, Gilbert Bream was blissfully ignorant, and in his blindness he began to weave a web of untruth and hypocrisy that would hide his soul, as he thought, from the gaze of the woman he loved; for he remembered — he could not for an instant forget it — that when he had declared to her his love, she had answered his protestations, if not in words at least in effect, with the declaration that she was the wife of another and in love

Defeat

with her husband. Hence Gilbert Bream sealed his lips on the subject that was nearest his heart, and by and by began to talk of his trip to Feather Bow as a business transaction, even though his soul ached with the desire to deliver its true message.

Mrs. Lake's countenance had often a world of meaning as she sat alone with him in the little room and listened to his babble of business and pleasure, in which, somehow or other, Barbara's name was always inextricably mixed. But Mrs. Lake was a wise sister in many ways, and she, too, held her peace.

Thus the days crawled by, and the storms alternately raged and the sun shone on the white towering mountains, while Gilbert Bream gained strength and health, and the deadening stiffness and numbness went out of his frozen limbs. The foot which the doctor at first thought would have to be sacrificed recovered its sense of feeling, but slowly, however, and threatened to give to his step a permanent limp.

As soon as the physician would permit him to leave Silverton, Bream departed for Denver, though he wanted to accompany Barbara and Mrs. Lake back to sunny San Diego, where the children had been left in charge of Mr.

Barbara

Lake. Somehow, without good reason as it seemed to him, he was not yet ready to open his heart again to Barbara, though the desire was ever present. He would go to San Diego later, was his resolve, when he felt stronger, and when that painful limp did not so trouble him, and then he would tell her how much he loved her, and trust to his great love to win for him the prize he coveted. His face was wan and sorrowful, nevertheless, at the thought of the separation; and if he had not slain his vanity, when he took Barbara's hand in parting he might have believed that she exhibited some show of emotion. But he did not venture to bear this hope away with him.

Before Gilbert Bream had been many days in Denver he began to experience an increasing consciousness that in many ways his actions toward Barbara had been base and unworthy. He did not know it yet, but some subtle change had taken place that permeated his whole inner being. Things done and things thought wore a different aspect. The truth was, that Bream's manhood was being uplifted by his great love. Even to know Barbara was to be benefited; to love her was to be transformed.

"I am not worthy of her, not worthy of so good and true a woman," was often his thought

Defeat

as he sat musing in his room in the Denver hotel. "Even Roger Timberly was more worthy of her than I am. But, then, no man could be worthy of her. To think that I might some day marry her is to think of mating the vulture with the dove. Yet I cannot give up the hope; and so long as I cannot, the thing for me to do is to see if I can't make myself more worthy of her. I can never do that, of course, but perhaps I can accomplish something in that line; and perhaps when she sees, if she ever does, that I am at least making a struggle, she will think more kindly of me. She might come to love me. I thought once that she did love me, mole that I am!"

The days went by, and the great desire to tell Barbara again that he loved her became to Bream irresistible. He was not yet ready to go to San Diego and make this confession, with the confession of his unworthiness, at her feet; but he felt that he could write to her. The letter and the distance would be a buffer to ease the force of the shock if she scorned him altogether. And so, though he had a sense that this was in a measure cowardly, and because he could not do otherwise, he wrote Barbara a letter — a letter in which he con-

Barbara

fessed everything, the search for Roger, the motives which prompted it, the irresistible conclusion of Roger's death, his undying love and devotion, — all, all. In addition, he magnified the baseness with which he charged himself; and, after ending by telling how he had acquired Bexar's mine, he enclosed a transfer of it to Barbara, together with a bank draft for the whole amount of its net earnings.

It was a strange letter, a mental conglomerate; but it revealed to Barbara more of the heart of Gilbert Bream than could have come through years of ordinary acquaintanceship. But Bream was not yet pure gold, and there was one thought which the letter did not reveal to Barbara. This was well, too, for the thought was essentially selfish, and it would have hurt and humiliated her. That was the thought and the hope that this valuable property and the bank draft for the large sum it had earned, would lift her entirely out of poverty and remove any barrier that a difference of financial standing might interpose between them.

Bream was in a fever of unrest and mental excitement after writing and posting this letter. Time and again he assured himself that he was a fool and a blunderer for writing it, yet he could not wish the act undone. Within a week

Defeat

he received an answer. He tore open the envelope with impatient eagerness. It seemed to him that he had waited weeks instead of days for that letter, and its bulk led him to anticipate a lengthy communication ; but he saw that Barbara had penned only a brief note, and that the bulkiness of the envelope was caused by the instrument of transfer and the bank draft, which now dropped out into his trembling hands.

The letter, which was dated at San Diego, ran as follows :

MY DEAR MR. BREAM,—I cannot convey to you how highly I value the honor of your love and how much I esteem you as a friend ; yet, since I do not return that love, but do most sincerely love the husband who seems lost to me, it is useless to think it possible that I can become your wife. Like you I have begun to think that my poor husband is dead, and since your dreadful experience at Silverton I can see readily how he may have lost his life in one of many ways without the fact ever reaching any one. Still, I hope most anxiously for his return, and am unwilling to abandon that hope. As for the deed to the mine and the draft, I must return them, as I cannot make it seem right that I should take either. The law gives you the mine, and what is yours legally I am morally unable to accept.

Very sincerely your friend,

BARBARA TIMBERLY.

Barbara

Thus were Gilbert Bream's hopes dashed to the earth; and, though latterly they had never risen high, their fall steeped his soul in bitterness and despair. The brevity of the letter and the things it did not say struck him with especial emphasis. Not a word did it hold concerning his tedious and perilous search for Roger Timberly. He had confessed the theft of the photograph, with the motive that had prompted it; that was not alluded to. He read and re-read the letter. There was no hope in it. She did not return his love, she had said so, and there was apparently nothing for him to do but to acquiesce in her decision, regrettable as it was.

The receipt of this letter from Barbara filled Gilbert Bream with a dull and apathetic hopelessness which made him anxious to get away from Denver; and as he was unwilling now to go back to San Diego, he turned his face eastward, in an uncertain, hesitating way that was altogether unlike any of the characteristics he had previously exhibited.

Finding no ease in Chicago or New York, Bream fled to London, then to Paris and to Rome; he wandered like an unquiet spirit through the lands of the Mediterranean; he thought of Barbara under the paws of the

Defeat

desert sphinx, and in the shadows of the pyramids he studied her face as it was portrayed to him by memory. In still other lands and beneath other suns recollections of Barbara pursued him.

Like many another man, Bream was attempting the impossible; he could not escape from himself, and because the memory of Barbara and the love he bore her had become a part of his existence he could not escape from that.

It drew him back to Denver. But before he saw Barbara again another summer had fled.

CHAPTER XVII

THE VICTORY OF THE WINGED GOD

RETURNING unannounced to Palmer Lake's suburban home at Denver, Gilbert Bream found the residence brilliantly illuminated, as if in honor of his coming. In the clear, cold, autumnal night the stars shone with a brightness that rivalled that of the electric lights, and the crisp, dry snow creaking under his feet as he advanced up the walk made him think of the blizzard and the snowy mountain slopes between Feather Bow and Silverton, where he had fought death.

Thoughts of Barbara had been with him all day as he sped westward across the gray plains. He knew that she was still with Mrs. Lake, almost a member of the family, in fact, and the possibility that this illumination, so suggestive of festivities, might be in honor of her wedding, came like a stab. Passing round to a side entrance, instead of directly into the house, he learned from a servant that a reception and dance was in progress. This information took the weight off his heart.

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He wanted to ask about Barbara, but could not bring himself to do it ; and, having gained access to the house, he hurried to his own apartments, which were kept always in readiness for him. With no further announcement of his presence he descended to the reception room when he had dressed, in a fever of impatience to meet Barbara, and hoping to find her there. He wondered how time had dealt with her since their last meeting, and if she still hoped for Roger's return—Roger, whose dust, he was sure, had long ago mingled with the mould of some far-away mountain or valley.

Bream sought Mrs. Lake first of all, and made known to her his return and presence in the house. She was overjoyed to see him, but she said not a word about Barbara, though she must have known that Barbara was uppermost in his mind. Her face was as unreadable as that great scarred stone visage with which the Egyptian sphinx had looked at him from the desert sands.

As soon as he could disengage himself from his sister and could answer some of the many questions asked him by Mr. Lake, Bream passed into the dancing-room, looking for Barbara. The place was filled with the gliding figures of waltzers and with beautiful and at-

Barbara

tractively gowned women and their escorts. Bream stood near the entrance, his gaze roving from point to point with intense and expectant eagerness. Then he caught his breath with a quick sigh. Barbara, more beautiful than ever, was waltzing toward him with a young army officer.

Her loveliness intoxicated him. She was attired in shimmering white, relieved by pink rosebuds nestling among their own green leaves on her bosom and a cluster of the same flowers in her hair. It was the first time he had seen her in evening dress.

Barbara swept by without seeing him. He felt a foolish resentment. Though so near, he was no more to her than one of the flowering plants that flung its fragrance on the pulsing air; aye, not so much — she was wholly unaware of his presence, and, as he thought, had perhaps almost forgotten his existence. He shot a glance of jealous fire at the young army officer.

In this moment of jealousy Bream moved in a direction opposite to that taken by Barbara and her companion, and finding an old Denver acquaintance he begged for the pleasure of a waltz and led her out upon the floor; where, with flying feet and hearts that seemed lighter

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than air, they were soon in a whirling chase after Barbara and the army officer.

It was during this waltz that Barbara became aware of Gilbert Bream's presence. The knowledge came like the thrill of an electric shock, and her heart burned with an unexpected sensation when she saw him bending above this Denver belle, into whose ears he was whispering little more than airy nothings. The very fact that Bream was no longer the skilful dancer he once had been — was not the equal of the young officer in this respect — touched Barbara, for she reflected that the halting gait which made him at times a little awkward was a relic of that search which had brought him so near to death. She no longer heard the music nor the officer's persiflage, while her cheeks took on a hue not caused by the exercise. All at once there had come to the heart now palpitating so wildly the unsought knowledge that she loved Gilbert Bream. And straightway the walls faded away, and she was once more in the little room in Silverton, where, in his ravings, Bream, confessing his search, had again and again urged his love upon her and besought her to become his wife.

Those hours in Silverton had remained with Barbara through all the intervening months,

Barbara

and they had pleaded Bream's cause with a never-dying eloquence. In spite of the hope so long cherished, the certainty of Roger's death had now been fixed indubitably in her mind. During the summer proof had been produced which could not be gainsaid. Though she might discredit the thoroughness of her own investigation, and undervalue likewise that made by Gilbert Bream, she could not believe that an insurance organization would pay to her the value of the policy Roger had held on his life so long as a single doubt of his death existed.

That had been done, and it had swept away all hope. In his early home Roger had become a member of a mutual insurance organization, and had kept his assessments paid after his removal to Kansas. Barbara had not herself moved in the matter, and Roger had no relatives to do so; but the subordinate lodge, whose members had been so well acquainted with both Roger and with Barbara, had taken up the question in her behalf, and had pressed it so persistently upon the supreme body of the organization that the insurance money had been sent to her, not, however, until the disbursing board had sought in vain to show that Roger might possibly still be alive.

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The lapse of time, too, even more than this formal action, had at last convinced Barbara that Roger could no longer be in the land of the living. She knew in her woman's heart that he had not abandoned her, and she was quite as sure that nothing less than death could account for his mysterious disappearance.

Out of this maze of thought and recollection Barbara was recalled to herself by the voice of the young officer, whose presence she was quite forgetting. Thus aroused, she continued through the waltz without a further lapse, but with a fervid and beating heart. Bream sought her out at the first opportunity ; and she had so far recovered her customary equanimity that she was able to question him concerning his return and his trip abroad ; but she was ill at ease, in spite of her self-control, and her manner lacked the vivacity and warmth of feeling that usually characterized it, a fact he could not fail to note. Bream danced with Barbara, and talked with her as much as he had opportunity, and throughout the evening feasted his eyes as much as possible on her loveliness.

The longing that had drawn Gilbert Bream back to Denver held him there, but sore recollection made it impossible for him to say to Barbara the things he had hoped to say. He

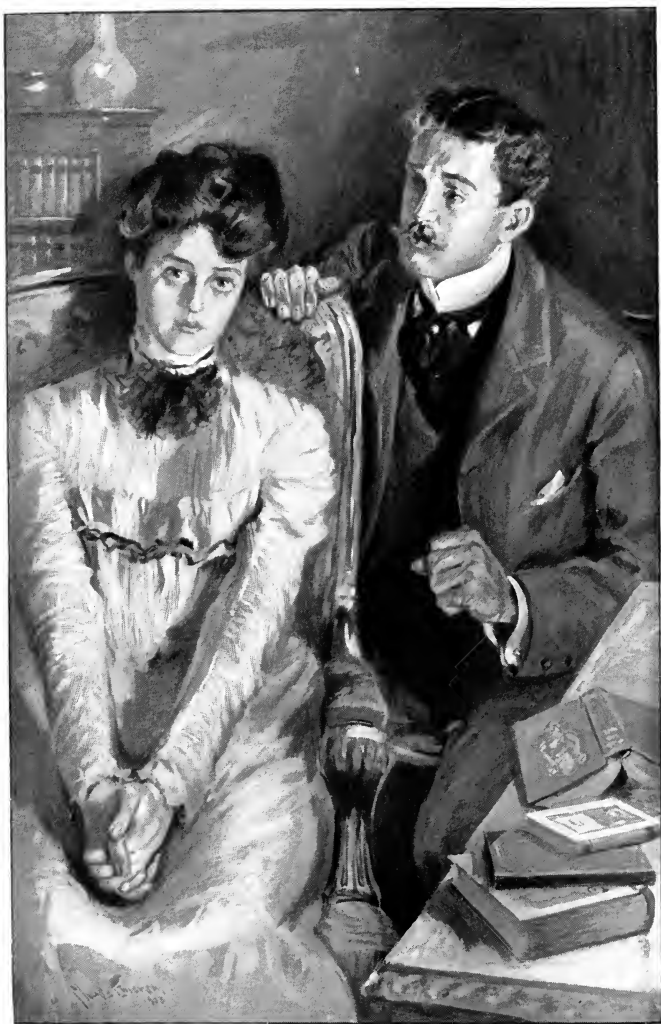
Barbara

was uncertain, too, about the position of the young army officer with whom she had danced on the night of his arrival. But when no more was seen or heard of that young gentleman Bream began to feel that he must be a coward if he could not find some opportunity in which to express the hope of his heart.

"If I can't, I shall have to go away from Denver again," he said to himself. "I'm eating my very soul out here. Yes, I shall have to go away; and all because I'm a coward. But who would n't be a coward, feeling as I do what a rejection would mean! But surely time enough has gone by now; surely she knows now that her husband is no longer living! And perhaps she does care for me a little; perhaps she could learn to love me."

While in this frame of mind Bream came upon Barbara one evening alone in the quiet of the library. Something of his former courage entered his heart as he noted the agitation which she tried to conceal. His entrance was unexpected and sudden, and she had been startled into a temporary and partial self-betrayal; but she looked up quietly, put aside the book she had been reading, and he came and took a seat near her.

"What did that mean? Did I read her



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face aright?" he asked himself; and in his mind there rose the familiar lines:

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dares not put it to the touch,
And win or lose it all!"

Suddenly he cast aside all doubts and hesitation, all memories of old defeats and foolish mistakes, and resolved to risk again the momentous question. Nothing could be gained by silence and further delay, he was sure. Why should he run away again, when he felt that he could not live without the love of this woman? Thus he asked himself. He would speak to her, he would know if she had changed her mind in any way, he would learn his fate!

"Barbara," he began, in a voice that was low and tremulous, "I had meant to go away again without saying anything of what is, as you must know, at all times uppermost in my mind."

He stopped in hesitation; but when she did not repulse him, he continued, in tones yet lower:

"It is the old, old story, Barbara. You know that I love you. I told you so long ago, and now I must tell you again. I cannot

Barbara

help loving you. I love you, dear, and I want you to become my wife."

In his earnestness he had placed his hand on her arm. He slipped it farther now, as he felt her tremble, and a tear fell on the hand that closed over hers as they lay in her lap.

"You are free, Barbara, to become my wife if you will," he urged. "There is not a doubt of it in my mind, and I do not see how it can be doubted by any one. The months and the years have flown, and the man who was your husband has not returned. He will never return, for he is no longer with the living. You must see that yourself."

Still there was no reply.

"Will you not give me a word of hope?" he begged. "I can be patient, Barbara. I can wait. Heavens! have n't I waited? Give me just one word of hope; I feel that I shall die without it. I believe that you do love me, Barbara. You do love me! Is it not so?"

She looked up at him with tear-wet eyes.

"I — I thought I did not," she said, in a voice that quavered. "But —"

Bream caught her to his heart in an impassioned embrace, his rapture passing all bounds.

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"Oh, Barbara! Barbara! You have given me such happiness as man never knew before. It makes another being of me. It seems to me that with you as my wife I can do anything — dare anything — accomplish anything."

Having broken bounds, his speech flowed on like a torrent unloosed from the fastnesses of the hills.

"You cannot know how it has uplifted and changed me just to know you, Barbara; and what could I not be if surrounded constantly by the influence of such a woman — so sweet a wife! 'You have drawn me upward toward your own high conceptions, and you could and will draw me still higher.'"

Gilbert Bream was not indulging in meaningless rapture; he felt and meant all that he said. Barbara's influence had uplifted him most wonderfully; hence he could declare truly that he was not the same man as when she had first known him. His feet had indeed been set on loftier heights.

"You do love me?" he asked again, for Barbara was strangely silent, it seemed to him, under this torrential outburst.

"Yes," she said; "I do love you, Gilbert."

Having thus learned that Barbara really loved him, Gilbert Bream became a most im-

Barbara

patient lover. He had so unexpectedly won the prize, at a time when he was ready to believe such a thing impossible, that he appeared to fear that it might yet be snatched from him. He urged continually that the wedding should not be long delayed, and Christmas Day was selected finally for the ceremony. Then followed days of preparation, which were happy ones to Barbara. Bream walked about the streets of Denver dreaming dreams. That which had for so long been the hope of his existence was to be realized at last.

The wedding by which Barbara Timberly became the wife of Gilbert Bream was a very quiet one. The city and the plains stretching away to the mountains were robed in garments of purest white. It was a sacred and solemn hour to Barbara as she stood within the little church, surrounded by a few friends, and, while the bright light from without came dimly in through the stained windows, took on herself these new vows. She had long ago laid Roger Timberly in the grave of her dead past, and now sought to face a future which she prayed might go on brightening and brightening to the end.

Barbara and Gilbert Bream were glad to get away from Denver, and turned their faces

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toward the East with pleasurable anticipations. Why dwell upon the details of that wedding trip? They made the tour of Europe. They saw London, Paris, Italy, and the Netherlands. Their sojourn was lengthened into many months.

Barbara's influence on Bream was very marked. Daily he grew in moral fibre and in everything that makes for true manhood. This uplifting of Gilbert Bream was not in the nature of a sudden miracle, however; beginning months before, it was the unfolding of a slow and beautiful growth, as the flower unfolds and perfects itself under the influence of the genial sunshine of heaven. There could be no doubt that Bream idolized Barbara. She could not have so affected his entire nature had it been otherwise. She was his ideal woman, a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honor.

How far away to Barbara seemed now those old days with Roger on the plains of Kansas. Amid the gayety of European capitals, by the storied Rhine, in sunny Italy, there was nothing to suggest them. Only when she stood amidst the Swiss mountains, and their lofty heights brought back memories of Pike's Peak and Cripple Creek, did the old, dead days seem

Barbara

near again. Even then she found it difficult to realize that her persistent and frenzied search had been a reality, and more than once she wonderingly asked herself if it could be possible that she had ever been the penniless and heart-broken editor of Cripple Creek? Was she really the woman who had looked with longing and aching eyes across the gray plains for the star route mail carrier whom she daily expected to bring to her from Roger the letters that never came? Yes, she was the same; and yet not the same.

Finally they turned their backs on the Old World and, after tarrying a little while in New York, journeyed leisurely to Denver. The memories evoked by this crossing of the plains were peculiarly painful to Barbara. They were taking the route of the Platte — she wondered if Bream had chosen it purposely! — but the plains are the plains, whether seen from the valley of the Platte or of the Arkansas.

Those far-reaching expanses of crisp, gray buffalo-grass, with here and there a solitary house or a small herd of cattle — how familiar they looked! Now and then a line of stunted trees flanked a house and showed the fructifying touch of irrigation; and when a reflected bit of blue sky lay on the earth like a smoke-

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rimmed lake, there swam to Barbara again through the miragy atmosphere Bexar's buck-board, and she heard once more the "br-r-r-r" of drought-loosened spokes and the clatter of pony hoofs. Then she drew down her veil as if to exclude the dust that worked into the car, but in reality to hide the tears that came unbidden to her eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII

“BARBARA : THE CONFESSIONS OF A SPIRIT”

GILBERT BREAM was too proud of his beautiful wife to be willing to begin their new life in Denver in anything but the most magnificent manner. He wished his jewel in a proper setting, and having won such a prize he was anxious that his friends should recognize his good fortune. Barbara appreciated deeply Bream's efforts to please her and to add to her happiness. She wondered often about the fate of Roger. Though certain of his death, she was sometimes startled into asking herself what she should do in the very improbable event of his return. She could not escape these questions any more than she could escape the dreams of Roger which sometimes came to her.

They remained quietly in Denver through the winter, though the cold frequently brought torture to Bream's frosted limbs. There was an almost imperceptible limp in his gait, which was pathetically suggestive to Barbara. In spite of this limp Bream was a handsome and

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attractive man, with square, well-set shoulders and a strong face.

Descending the stairway one evening Barbara heard sounds of conversation in the hall below. The words chained her. Bream was talking with a man whose voice she did not recognize, but Roger's name had been mentioned. This man was Sam Swainson. Standing in the dimly lighted hall, his face flushed with drink and his garments in rags, he looked more disreputable than ever. No greater contrast can be imagined than that presented by the two men who now faced each other. Swainson had gone from bad to worse, descending from depth to depth, until what little manhood he had possessed appeared to have deserted him entirely. Now he had come up to Denver and to Bream's residence in the hope of extorting money. Bream had been in the hall when the door-bell rang; he had opened the door, and Swainson had pushed in past him with a snarl and an oath. Now he was swearing and threatening.

“You kin say what you please, Gilbert Bream, and you kin kick me out of here; but that don't alter the facts. Timberly is alive, and I kin show it; I seen him not a month ago.”

Barbara

"You're lying, Swainson. You know that Timberly is dead. This is a game of blackmail."

Swainson was repulsively familiar in his reply.

"Never a lie about that, pard. Don't you 'low yourself to believe any such thing, or you're bound to get fooled in the very worst way. Of course I hain't any call to blab the thing, and I won't, if you'll make it of interest to me to keep my mouth shut. I ain't denyin' that I'm hard up, fer I am. A small amount o' money would go a long way with me just now, and you've got plenty of it."

Gilbert Bream's anger flared out.

"Get out of here, Swainson, or I'll pitch you through the doorway. You blackmailing scoundrel, do you think I would give you money to—"

Bream's voice had risen, and he was moving toward Swainson as if intending to put his threat into execution, when he was stopped by the sound of a fall. In another moment he had leaped to the foot of the stairway and was bending over Barbara who was lying there unconscious. There was a slight cut in her forehead, received as she fell, and her white face, showing ghastly under the light, made Bream

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fear for the moment that she was dead. In a frenzy of alarm and anxiety he sent a call ringing through the house for the servants; then, supporting Barbara's head on his knee, he turned toward Swainson, who was backing in haste through the doorway.

“You devil!” he said. “You have killed her!”

Swainson vanished; and before the servants could answer his call Bream lifted Barbara from her limp position and bore her quickly and tenderly to her room. Then the physician was summoned. Barbara was not dead, but she passed down into the very valley of the shadow. The flickering life of the child that was born to her went out like a candle that is rudely blown upon. In a conscious interval she heard its pitiful little cry; then she sank back, seemingly into the very arms of death. When she came again to herself, and knew she was never to see its face, her heart broke.

In those trying hours there was no limit to the devotion of Mrs. Lake. She was with Barbara almost constantly, with a hand ever ready to soothe and a voice ever ready to encourage. Nor was Bream lacking in any display of tenderness and watchful care. The blackness of despair had settled on him when

Barbara

he feared for a time that he was to lose his young and beautiful wife, — she to whom he felt that he owed everything that was worthy in him, and whom he loved so devotedly. The thought of facing the future without her had been maddening. Now, in spite of their mutual loss, he was cheerful and almost happy, so stimulating was the knowledge that she would recover.

Sam Swainson was arrested, at Bream's instigation; and, being brought coweringly to the house and into Barbara's presence, he confessed in a fright that he really knew nothing of Roger, and that the statements made to Bream were made solely for the purpose of extorting blackmail. The wretch fairly shivered as he looked at Barbara, who lay against her pillow as white and fragile as the petal of a lily. Her reproachful gray eyes, turned on him with such pathos and appeal, penetrated his very soul. Sam Swainson had sunk low; but he was not all bad, as his words showed.

"I did n't think of her," he admitted, shivering as he looked at Barbara. "Indeed, I did n't. Nor I did n't have any idea that she might hear what I was sayin'. Lord! I hain't got nothin' ag'inst her. I just felt low-down and mean and miser'ble, and was determined to

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have some money by fair means or foul. It may be that Roger Timberly is livin', but if he is I don't know nothin' about it, and I don't think it.”

He trembled as he talked, and looked altogether so forlorn and so sincerely penitent that Barbara's sympathies were touched, notwithstanding the great wrong he had done her. She begged Bream to let Swainson go without punishment, and Bream yielded in this, as he did in all other things when her wishes were made known.

Barbara convalesced but slowly, and weeks went by before she was able to be driven out. Then her strength returned more rapidly, and little by little the world began again to look fair and to hold a promise of happiness. More and more Gilbert Bream came to know the loveliness of her character. He could understand her gentle sweetness, purity, and nobility better than once, for he had himself grown in all the essentials of true manhood, and her influence created constantly new ideals for him and lifted him ever into higher atmospheres. Though his business interests were many and distracting, Bream always found time to play the lover to Barbara.

One day she took up a new novel. Bream

Barbara

had brought it in that morning, saying it was attracting some attention, and that, though he had not read it, he thought, from the title, she might like to glance it over. As she picked it up her attention was caught by the cover. It was dainty, but its daintiness was rendered almost bizarre by the dim outline of a ghostly figure that swam earthward through a zone of clouds, bearing a written scroll. The title of the novel was, "Barbara: the Confessions of a Spirit;" and the name of the author was given as Alexander Vane, a new name in letters, so far as she knew.

The contents were quite as remarkable as the title; and, as Barbara read, her interest became painfully intense, and the odd feeling came to her that she had somewhere read a work that must have been identical with this. There was a familiar turn to the sentences, a peculiar and original way of marshalling the thoughts, that impressed her strangely. It was like a voice from another life.

The story was of Western experience, told by one having the pervading spiritual insight of a soul that has cast aside its clogging, earthly vestments. The hero of the story was represented as having lost his life in Death Valley; and his fate was in a measure a punishment for

“The Confessions of a Spirit”

an angry parting with Barbara, his sweetheart, in a moment of pique. The tale took such hold on Barbara that Death Valley became to her a vital reality. Its naked lava ridges and staring white buttes ; its blinding alkali wastes ; its parched, sand-filled waterways, sucked dry by the drought of centuries ; its blistered peaks, lifting themselves in the swimming distances, petrified sentinels on these plains of death ; — Barbara saw them all.

With the hero of the story, she wound her way in agony from aridity to aridity, tearing her fingers to the bone in frantic efforts to dig to the water that seemed to lie just below the surface, lured by mocking mirages whose lies were as beautiful as their promises were false, then with swollen tongue and bloodshot eyes reeling on again, pursued by shapeless phantoms that grew bolder and more menacing as strength and courage dwindled. By and by came the madness of torture and despair, when the teeth of the hapless wanderer tore in frenzy at the earth that would not yield its moisture ; and thus, raving, he died.

Trembling and agitated, Barbara put down the book at the close with a painful feeling that it must have been written by Roger Timberly. Many of the conversations came

Barbara

almost as recollections. Its sentiments were such as she had heard Roger express many times. Yet this was a new work by a new author, just from the press of the publishers, and evidently written since Roger had left her and gone to his mysterious death.

“Barbara : the Confessions of a Spirit !” was the title before her eyes ; and looking at this title, as she pondered over the strange story, she could hardly repress the almost superstitious feeling that the story was truly the confessions of a disembodied soul, — Roger’s disembodied soul, — and that the narrative was a circumstantial account of the sufferings which he endured before death came to his relief. She believed now that he had gone out into the desert, — the desert beyond the Mancos, not Death Valley, — and had there lost his life in some such way as that set forth in the book.

Barbara tried to cast aside what seemed a foolish fancy, but could not. If Roger were the author of this volume, then he was not dead. And thus was forced on her the disturbing reflection that she might be mistaken in the belief she had reached concerning his fate. Perhaps he had not gone to his death. Perhaps he was living, and this novel was

“The Confessions of a Spirit”

really his work, under an assumed name now borne by him as his real name or under a pseudonym. Her mental uncertainty and disquiet became pitiable. There was something in the book which told her that it had been written by Roger; yet she had so thoroughly convinced herself of his death, and above all had so stoutly maintained and believed that he would not have deserted her, that she could but conclude that the strange similarities of style and thought were nothing more than coincidences.

Mingled with these harassing thoughts and conjectures was a feeling akin to fear, which, though she tried to put it from her, returned persistently. Was she now willing to have Roger come back into her life? She could not be the wife of two men. She recognized the fact that if Roger still lived he was her husband and she was an unwitting bigamist. Bream, whom she had learned to love as she had never loved Roger, must go from her side. She realized now that her love for Roger had been more immature, more of a girlish fancy, than the love she held for Gilbert Bream, which was the deep love of womanhood. True, had it been unbroken, her love for Roger might have grown as strong, for

Barbara

hers was one of those loyal natures which looks not beyond the crown of its chosen king.

The immediate result of the reading of the book was a determination to discover, if possible, the identity of the author of "Barbara." Having decided to say nothing to Bream of the disquieting uncertainty that now distressed her until after she had secured some definite information, she wrote a note of inquiry to the publishers.

Then she began to search through the newspapers and literary journals for reviews and criticisms of the novel, anxious to see how the critics viewed it, and what were their opinions concerning the motive that had induced its writing. She found that it was being generously noticed, but the opinions of its merits and demerits were as divergent as the poles. Some regarded it as the work of a fresh and vigorous mind, others discovered in it the earmarks of a certain well-known author, and others still thought its publication little better than a waste of good, white paper. From these clashing views Barbara turned in despair, for they could not help her.

She put the book aside that evening, that it might not attract Bream's attention and induce

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questions which she knew she was not ready to answer. He did not recur to it, fortunately. Barbara had not regained her health entirely, and observing the next morning that she did not seem even as well as usual, Bream urged her to accompany him to Georgetown and Silver Plume, whither he meant to go on a brief business trip.

“It will do you good,” he said anxiously. “You have not been out of Denver for months. We can get back this evening, you know.”

Barbara pleaded that she was not strong enough for the journey, which was indeed true, but she had almost a sense of guilt and criminal deception when she beheld the look of pain in his eyes. He returned to the house at noon, saying he had concluded not to go away at all, and he stayed at home throughout the rest of the day, anxious and solicitous. Barbara’s spirits were undeniably low, a fact he could not fail to recognize.

Bream remained at home two days, when urgent business demanded that he should leave the city. Barbara had apparently improved in health in the meantime. The declaration of his intention to be gone two or three days really brightened her; yet the tears came into

Barbara

her eyes when he turned to go, and there arose in her heart an almost irresistible desire to tell him everything and secure comfort and reassurance from him. But she held back, terrified and distressed by the thought that after all she could not be sure that he was her husband.

Bream insisted that she must send him daily a message by wire, as the mails were too slow; and when he passed into the outer hall Barbara heard him instruct one of the servants to telegraph him without hesitation if the mistress should chance to take a turn for the worse, as in that event he should want to return to Denver at once. Then, with the memory of his many kindnesses fresh in her mind, Barbara watched him go slowly down the walk, out at the gate and beyond her sight.

His absence made her lonesome and unhappy; still, in her contradictory heart, she was glad he was gone, for the constant danger of the betrayal of her thoughts went with him. Now that he was away, she again took up the volume that had so disturbed her, and after reading certain impressive pages she placed it on the table. She desired to think over it, and hoped that by a study of its style and contents she might be able to determine in her own mind if the author were Roger.

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When Bream had been gone two days there came a letter from the publishers of “Barbara,” stating that Alexander Vane did not desire his address and identity to become known; but that, if she would write to him in their care, they would undertake to forward the letter, leaving to him the discretion of answering it. The wording of this note told Barbara that “Alexander Vane” was but a pen name, and this increased the feverish uncertainty under which she was laboring. More and more she began to feel that “Alexander Vane” and Roger Timberly were one and the same person.

With her mind in a whirl of doubt and anxiety she now wrote a long letter to the author of “Barbara,” her pen running on and on, even while she was constantly on the point of tearing up what she had written, for she could hardly justify herself in thus laying bare her heart to one who was probably an entire stranger. When it was written she did tear it up; and wrote instead a brief note, appealing to the author to answer her, and begging him, if he were Roger Hayes Timberly, to explain his strange disappearance and subsequent conduct.

“I shall have to wait more than a week for

Barbara

an answer," was her thought. "How can I endure the suspense? But Alexander Vane cannot be Roger! If Roger were alive he would have communicated with me long ago. The thought that he may be living is just a silly fancy. Perhaps I ought to have spoken to Gilbert about it—ought to have shown him the book and told him everything. But I could n't—I could n't. I shall tell him all by and by, and I know he will forgive me."

CHAPTER XIX

"ALEXANDER VANE"

THE next day Barbara received a telegram and a letter from Bream, which she answered perfunctorily, feeling like a hypocrite and a criminal.

And so the days passed. She spent much time in searching the papers and magazines for literary notices of "Alexander Vane," and suffered a suspense that was hardly endurable. Bream did not return at the end of the three days, being detained longer than he had expected; but in the letter that came in his stead he said he was hurrying his business matters through, and assured her that he would return as soon as he could. Reading between the lines, she could see that her letters and messages did not satisfy him, and that he was worried about the state of her health.

Barbara's suspense increased as the time passed. She knew that days and even weeks might elapse before she could hear from "Alexander Vane." He might be at the

Barbara

other side of the globe. She was sure, though, that he was an American writer, and that he had depicted scenes which his eyes had witnessed.

As she looked over the headlines of the paper one morning she was much startled by what she saw. A man whose real name was said to be Talbot Barnes, but who, from a letter found in one of his pockets, was believed to be "Alexander Vane," the author, had been run down in the night by a Denver cab and was lying in a critical condition at the city hospital.

"I must see him at once!" was her cry. "Oh, my God! can it be Roger?"

From the account that followed the sensational heading she learned that Talbot Barnes was a stranger in Denver, having come there not long before, and that he had been doing some newspaper work for the "Rocky Mountain News." The report of his landlady showed that he had kept closely to his room, when not at the office of the paper, and that he had done a great deal of writing. He was also said by his associates on the paper to have been reticent as to his past, and little inclined to enter into general conversation with any one.

"I must see him!" said Barbara, in a ner-

“Alexander Vane”

vous tremor. “I must settle this doubt or it will kill me.”

Outwardly repressing her feelings she hastened to the hospital. As she approached the building her courage nearly failed. A dozen times she had argued herself into the conviction that the injured man could not be Roger, only to brush the arguments aside. The strongest of these arguments had turned on the name, Talbot Barnes. Roger might use a literary pseudonym, but it did not seem to her possible that he would adopt an alias.

A mist swam before her eyes as she drew near the door, but she conquered the feeling of faintness and entered. When an attendant approached she steadied her voice and told him she would like to see Talbot Barnes, the man who had been run down by a cab in the night. She had drawn aside her veil and the face she presented was as colorless as wax. The attendant gave her a keen glance, which mingled curiosity with pity, then conducted her into a waiting-room and left her.

He returned presently, saying she could see the patient, and she followed him silently until he stopped in front of a door. She looked beyond him as he opened the door, and her vision again blurred as she caught a glimpse

Barbara

of white cots in a ward of the hospital. Was Roger occupying one of them? She would soon know, she thought, and passed through the doorway.

Beside a cot drawn close to a window the attendant stopped and beckoned, and Barbara advanced with breathless anxiety. The occupant of the cot was asleep or unconscious, with his face turned from her so that she could not see it. The air was charged with the odor of carbolic acid, evidencing to her that surgeons had been at work. After an instant of hesitation Barbara bent over and looked into the face. There were patches of court plaster on it and a bloody bandage across the forehead. But there was no mistaking those features. She would have recognized them anywhere and under any circumstances. That cut, bruised face was the face of Roger Timberly. As she saw this, Barbara's limbs seemed to sink under her, and the attendant pushed forward a chair, into which she dropped with a painful sigh.

"I may sit by him awhile, may I not?" she asked timidly.

"A little while," he said. "He is unconscious now, but we hope he is better. A relative, I suppose?"

“Alexander Vane”

She hesitated.

“Yes,” she said, “a relative.”

Then the attendant went away ; and when Barbara had again looked into the bruised face, studying its every line, and had listened to the labored breathing, she took up a nurse’s fan, and sat there, with staring, tearless eyes, pondering on the deep mystery presented by this discovery. It could not be solved. Apparently Roger had abandoned her pitilessly and without remorse ; but this she could not believe. Why, then, had he left her without a word of explanation ? It was a question that Roger only could answer.

Barbara recognized the fact that he was still her husband, for she was not willing to admit that, having abandoned her, he had probably also sought and obtained a divorce. On the subject of divorce she held to the beliefs of New Testament scripture ; and thus believing, even if Roger had secured a divorce from her, that act of his could not absolve her from her marriage vow, which had been until death. But, if she were still the wife of Roger Timberly, what was she to Gilbert Bream ?

It frightened her to reflect that Bream might return to the city at any time, — that very day, that very hour, — and not finding her at home

Barbara

might seek for her and discover her here. She asked herself what effect such a discovery would have on him. Would it not crush him? However, as Bream did not appear, she was given time for a thorough study of the situation, — too much time, in truth, when the thoughts that came were of a kind to drive her into a frenzy. She accused herself of having been hasty in consenting to a marriage with Bream, though she knew she had not been hasty. The months and the years had flown since Roger kissed her that farewell good-bye on the station platform in Paragon. She had waited and believed in him; she had searched until searching was in vain. His silence alone had driven her to the conviction that he was dead. Was not his the blame, then? How could she know that he still lived? Why had he treated her so? He could have written a letter — one little letter; but not a word had come from him. They had not been unhappy in their little home on the plains; she had felt very happy there, and she believed that he had been happy there with her. Yet he had gone away, like a coward and a craven, without a word — without a word! What could it mean? What did it mean? These were some of the thoughts that burned and ran riot in Barbara's mind, as

“Alexander Vane”

she sat silently by that white cot in the Denver hospital where Roger lay.

Though not skilled in such matters, Barbara was sure that Roger's condition was serious. His low moans and his restless tossing cut her to the heart. She felt an unfathomable pity for him. She did not know his story, unless something of it had been detailed in his book. There might be — there must be — palliating circumstances! She resolved not to believe any evil of him, unless he admitted it himself. Then came the thought that he might continue in this unconscious state, and die without giving her a word of explanation. That was something she could not contemplate; if it came, it would be something she could not endure. But he might live! Did she hope that he would live? The suggestion that she could hope for anything else startled her. Yes, she hoped that he would live, whatever the result might be. She was in God's hands, she assured herself; and Roger Timberly and Gilbert Bream were in God's hands. If Roger could live, she asked God to spare him, and then guide her into the things she ought to do. If Roger lived, she would still be his wife; and, if there was no good reason why she should not, if he had a valid excuse for

Barbara

what he had done, — yes, she would again live with him ! She would be his wife, would she not ? His wife ! — even though she knew now that she loved Gilbert Bream better and more than she had ever loved Roger Timberly.

With such thoughts Barbara troubled and distressed herself until the doctor came. She knew that her mental faculties were in an incoherent, chaotic state. She did not seem to be able to think clearly at all ; and none of the vexing questions could be settled until after Roger had told his story, and it was seen whether he was to live or to die. When the doctor came, Barbara rose to her feet ; but, though he looked at her in inquiry, she did not introduce herself nor make any statement. What name could she give him ? Mrs. Bream, or Mrs. Timberly ? Fortunately he did not put his curiosity into words. She stood aside and studied his face as he bent above Roger ; but the face was as expressionless as a stone wall, and she gained no information from it.

“ Do you think he is better ? ” was her trembling inquiry.

The doctor did not answer until he had listened carefully to the breathing and had felt Roger’s pulse.

“ It is a life and death fight, madam, ” he

“Alexander Vane”

said at last, as he rose from his kneeling position by the cot. “I should n’t want to venture an opinion either way. The injuries are of a serious nature, and the man does n’t seem to have been very robust. He is rather emaciated, as you can see.”

The hands and wrists were pathetically thin, though Barbara had noticed that the palms were hard and calloused, as if Roger had been engaged in heavy manual labor.

“If—if he should die,” she faltered, “do you think he would regain consciousness before the end came?”

The doctor looked at her closely, with the inquiring expression he had first used. Her face was white and drawn and her eyes large and anxious. Something in her appearance touched him.

“I do not think I ought to express an opinion as to that either,” he said, in a softened tone. “But we will not admit that he is going to die. His condition is extremely critical, but not hopeless.”

Nevertheless, he said it with the air of a man who declares sturdily, against the indications and the probabilities, that “while there is life there is hope.”

A nurse came up, to whom the doctor now

Barbara

gave some verbal instructions, and then wrote further instructions and a prescription, which he left on a table.

"I will come again," said Barbara, studying the face of the nurse. She felt that she must go. She had been by the cot a long time, and Bream might be at the house waiting for her and wondering what had become of her. "I will come again as soon as I can."

She was on the point of asking that if there came any turn for the worse in Roger's condition, or if he regained consciousness, she should be sent for, but was checked by the puzzle of not knowing how to make her wishes known without being forced to say more than she was yet willing to say, and by the further reflection that if a message should be sent to the house for her, and Bream were there, he would learn of it.

"I will come again soon," she reiterated, in a faltering way; then moved away from the cot and out of the ward.

When she reached home she found a letter from Bream awaiting her. This she opened nervously, and was given a sense of genuine relief by his statement that business matters might keep him away from Denver a day or two longer. She took up a pen to answer this

“Alexander Vane”

letter, but laid it aside. What could she say to him? Anything would be false, she felt, that did not express her feelings. It seemed to be worse than deception to write him a letter which made no mention of their changed relations — changed by the discovery she had made. He would know it by and by, and she had no desire to hide the truth from him; only she could not bring herself to communicate it yet. He would know soon enough. It would destroy his happiness, tear down the beautiful fabric of his home life, despoil all his hopes. She could not hasten to convey to him a message which would mean for him such misery.

“I will send no answer,” was her conclusion. “That will hurry him back; and, though I do not know whether I desire it, perhaps his return will be for the best. The end must come, and soon. It cannot be evaded.”

Having learned that Bream was not at home, and might be away a day or two longer, Barbara was now wild to get out of the house. Its air seemed to stifle her. Though it had been her home, it was not her home. She believed that he whom she had regarded lately as her husband was not her husband; and though she had mourned sincerely the loss of her child,

Barbara

she felt that she ought now to rejoice that it had not been spared to her. Anxiety concerning Roger's condition drew her quickly back to the hospital.

"Your name, please?" said the man who now met her at the door when she asked again to see Talbot Barnes.

She hesitated. She had hoped the question would not be put.

"A relative," she said, after a moment of uncertainty that must have puzzled the questioner. "I live in Denver, and I was here this morning, and saw him without objection being made."

"The man who was hurt last night," he said, as he admitted her. "He is in a very bad way, ma'am. But I suppose it will be all right. I will ask the doctor."

He was called away without doing so, however; and Barbara, who knew now the way to the cot, was soon at Roger's side. His mind had been wandering and he was talking wildly. She believed that his condition had grown worse. Seating herself by the bed, she looked at him with tender, pitying eyes as she listened to his ravings. He muttered sentences and scraps from his book; laughed now and then at the humorous talk of one of its characters,

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a mirthless, heart-breaking laugh to Barbara ; but raved for the most part, and seemed to live over again in his delirium some terrible experience, — the experience in the desert, she believed.

By and by the doctor came in again to ascertain Roger's condition. Barbara moved aside to make way for him as before, and critically scanned his face.

“ Still very bad,” he said ; “ but he might be worse, a great deal worse.”

A nurse came when the doctor went away. She understood, or had been told, that Barbara was a “ relative ” of the injured man, and she gave Barbara a kind glance.

“ We think he is some better,” she ventured, as she looked into Roger's face. “ His injuries were very serious, though, and the doctors at first thought he could n't live. But they are hopeful now, and say that he has a chance. He has a good deal of vitality, even if his appearance does n't indicate it. He has been working very hard, I presume ? ”

This was in the form of a question, and Barbara could not evade an answer. It was a safe question to reply to. Roger always worked hard.

“ Yes,” she said, “ he has always been a hard worker.”

Barbara

"And hard work will tell on any one, you know. But really I think that his chances are now quite good. He has rallied very much in the last hour or so."

"Has he been conscious at any time?" Barbara ventured to ask.

"No, not yet; but he may return to consciousness at any moment now. His temperature is not so high. High temperature produces delirium, you know. With the fall of his temperature we think he will come to himself. Yet those injuries to the head are severe."

She sat down by the cot, and, looking from Barbara to Roger, continued what she meant to be a cheery and hopeful little talk. She knew how serious was Roger's state, but there was hope, and she desired to make the most of that hope, for the benefit of this "relative," who was so white-faced and evidently so anxious. Her eyes had a questioning look at times, but Barbara did not care to tell the nurse just then that Roger was — had been — her husband.

As evening drew on the improvement in Roger's condition became more marked. The nurse had gone, and Barbara was bending over him, passing a dampened cloth across his face,

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when he opened his eyes. He stared at her for a moment; then he recognized her, and with a cry fell back as if dead. That cry drew another from Barbara. It brought a physician and some attendants hurrying into the ward, where they found Roger apparently lifeless and Barbara lying across the cot in a faint. Barbara recovered quickly under their ministrations, however; though Roger did not. For a long time after her restoration to consciousness her fears were very grave.

“It is only the result of a shock,” the doctor assured her, “and he will come out of it. I am afraid you have been saying something to him which you should not. You are related to him, I believe?”

“Yes,” said Barbara, “very closely related.”

She wondered if she ought to tell the whole truth as to that relationship. It might be better in the end. But somehow she could not bring herself to do it. She could not share her thoughts and her troubles with this stranger, even though he was the attendant physician and surgeon. However, she declared that she had not spoken to the patient at all, but that he, rousing as if from a sleep, had appeared to swoon when he saw and recognized her.

Barbara

"His outcry and the fall, which I feared was more than a swoon, overcame me," she explained; "but indeed I did not say a word to him."

The doctor remained by the cot a long time, and when he went away it was evident that Roger was again much better. He was resting quietly, though apparently unconscious. When at last he came once more to himself, with a clear, calm light in his eyes, he and Barbara were alone together.

"I thought it was a dream," he said, his face brightening. "It seemed too good to be true."

She was again bending over him. He passed a hand falteringly across his head and looked puzzled when he touched the bandages.

"You were hurt," she explained gently. "You were knocked down and run over by a cab in the street, you know."

"Was I?" he asked, evidently struggling to recall the circumstance. Then he looked round the room.

"What place is this?"

"This is the Denver hospital," she answered. "You were brought here after you were hurt."

The puzzled light did not leave his eyes.

“Alexander Vane”

“And you?” he demanded. “How did you get here? Where have you been?”

Where had she not been? She could not answer that question, but said :

“I saw in the newspaper that you had been hurt and I came here.”

She took the weak, wavering hand in hers and drew it toward her.

“Oh!” he said, in reply to her explanation.

Then he closed his eyes wearily and apparently fell asleep.

CHAPTER XX

A STRANGE STORY

AFTER some time Roger Timberly again opened his eyes. He tried to smile as his glance rested on Barbara, who still held his thin hand and seemed to be sitting in the position she had assumed before he fell asleep.

"It was n't a dream," he said, his bandaged face lighting with pleasure; "not a dream that you were sitting there!"

He stared round the room again, felt of the bandages, and memory stirred.

"You did not stay in Kansas?" he asked, starting up. "You came up here to look for me? Denver! How did I happen to be in Denver?"

He stared about, and seemed hardly to expect an answer; and Barbara, with tears that came in spite of herself, watched in silence the struggle that was taking place in his mind. He was evidently unable to recall the past, a failure which Barbara attributed to the injuries given to his head.

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"The newspapers say that you came here to get work," she answered at last, to relieve his increasing bewilderment. "You secured a position on the 'Rocky Mountain News,' and —"

He stared at her.

"Then I must have come here from Cripple Creek!" he said, with a deep and puzzled sigh.

"You are worrying yourself," she urged. "It will all be clear to you when you are a little better. It would be much better if you would try to rest now. I think I ought to forbid further talk. The doctor would not wish it, I know."

Only a deep sense of duty to his interest enabled Barbara to say this. What Roger had said but increased her anxiety to hear more. He was puzzled; he did not know how he came to be in Denver, but thought he had come there from Cripple Creek. She saw that there was some lapse of memory. Apparently he did not yet recall the incidents and experiences which had intervened since his visit to Cripple Creek. That would come later, she was sure, and it meant so much to her in every way that she felt she could hardly wait for the revelation. Nevertheless, she crushed down

Barbara

this wild desire, and again urged Roger to talk no more at that time.

He was like a tired child, and being thus emphatically conjured he lay back on the pillow and in a little while seemed to forget the things that had so disturbed him. In this apparently somnolent state he remained for some time. Then he opened his eyes again, looked Barbara earnestly in the face as if to assure himself that she was actually there, and began with feverish eagerness :

“ I remember how it was now ! ”

Barbara's heart leaped. The awful veil, the dreadful mystery, was to be removed, and at last she was to understand.

“ Yes,” he went on ; “ I went to Cripple Creek, and then I started for the Mancos country with Jim Thompson. Let me see ! Why did we go there ? Oh, yes, Thompson said there was gold there ; and then I wanted to see the cliff dwellings.”

Barbara was bending eagerly toward him, clinging to his hand, wildly anxious for every word. Roger stopped with clouding face and passed his free hand across his eyes.

“ It's gone,” he said, with pathetic disappointment. “ I thought I could remember it, but I can't seem to.”

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Roger's disappointment could not possibly have been greater than Barbara's. She could have cried aloud with the anguish of it. She still bent over him, held his hand, and looked into his eyes.

"You will remember it all when you are better," she said, trying to keep her voice from trembling. "Don't try to think any more about it now. You can tell me everything when you are better."

The physician came into the ward, advanced to the cot, and looked keenly at his patient.

"I am afraid, madam, that your presence is not doing him any good!" he protested, though his tones were mild. "I hope you have n't been saying anything to excite him?"

Roger caught the low words, crying out:

"She shall not be sent away! Do you hear? I want her to stay. Her presence here does n't harm me, it does me good. I want her to stay."

"Very well," said the physician, as if conciliating a sick child. "She may remain awhile longer, if you wish it. But you must n't talk too much. I am afraid you are not doing yourself any good by it, Mr. Barnes."

As soon as the physician was gone Barbara sought to impress on Roger the need of cau-

Barbara

tion, and again adjured him to think no more about the matter until he was stronger. But Roger was not ready to obey. He stared at her in inquiry, his memory apparently groping about in an effort to piece together some stray bits of recollection. In the supposition that his mind was dwelling on the words of the physician, Barbara tried to assist him.

"He thinks your name is Talbot Barnes."

"Barnes?" he questioned, in a daze.

"Yes, Talbot Barnes."

The puzzled look deepened.

"There is something the matter with my head," he declared at last. "I don't seem to be able to think clearly."

"Your head was hurt by the cab, you know," she said sympathetically. "As soon as you are better it will be all right."

He appeared not to hear her.

"Barnes!" he muttered. "Talbot Barnes! Talbot Barnes!"

Then his face brightened and he rose half erect, clutched Barbara's hand with a nervous twitch, and stared her full in the face.

"It's coming back to me," he said. "I was in the Colorado Insane Asylum!" He shivered. "It was there that I took the name of Talbot Barnes. They didn't know what

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my name was, and I did n't know, and so they gave me the name they found on a card in my pocket. But that was n't my right name. I remember now. It is Timberly. And your name is Barbara — Barbara Timberly. Yes, I remember now!"

Barbara had crept nearer to him and now had her arm under his head, supporting it.

"You must not talk, Roger, and excite yourself so. It will be better for you if you will lie down and keep quiet. You can tell me all about it after awhile. I want to learn about it, but you can tell me later."

Barbara did not know whether to credit the statement about the asylum for the insane or not, though it was capable of explaining many things. His eyes were wild, and she doubted if his mind was perfectly clear. Her desire to have him tell everything was palpitatingly keen, but a due regard for his condition caused her to urge him to be quiet.

"You must rest, Roger!" she insisted.

"I can't rest!" he cried. "I must tell you about it. That is, if I can remember it. It comes and goes, like the recollection of a dream. One moment I feel sure of it and then it floats away. I must tell you now while it is in my mind."

Barbara

He was panting with excitement and eagerness and would not hearken to her urging.

"I went into the Mancos country with Jim Thompson. We took the train to Dolores, and continued the trip from there on mules. We expected to be back in a week or ten days at the outside. I wrote a letter to you before starting from Cripple Creek, but forgot to mail it and lost it. I lost some other letters, too. When we got to Dolores I wrote another letter to you, and gave it to Thompson to mail while I looked up some mules. I did n't know that he neglected to mail it, until after we were lost in the desert."

"You are exciting yourself, Roger," she urged. "You should n't try to talk until you are stronger. You can tell me all about this later. You must stop now."

"No, I won't stop now!" he declared, his eyes rolling. "I must tell you now while I can; it may go away from me again."

She started to rise as if to summon the physician or a nurse. He clutched and held her hand.

"No, you shall not call the doctor. I don't want him. I don't need him. I want to tell you what happened. We went beyond the Mancos country, and in trying to get back we

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became lost. We must have pushed further into the desert without knowing it. After our mules died, and while we were wandering on, I found scraps of that letter one day, and then I knew that Thompson had forgotten to mail it and had now tried to destroy it."

The look that came into Roger Timberly's face at this recollection was something terrible to see.

"I flew at him in a rage and tried to choke the life out of him. The thought that through his neglect and forgetfulness you were left in ignorance of our plans and destination crazed me for the time, and it was only a lack of strength that kept me from killing him."

Barbara was trembling violently. Again and again she had urged him to be quiet, to restrain himself, and tell her the story at another time. He stopped for an instant, shaking in every nerve and muscle, and tried to wipe the beady sweat from his face.

"God! it was awful — terrible! I could n't wish such agony to my worst enemy. Perhaps I was more to blame than Thompson, for I failed to mail my letter from Cripple Creek, but I did n't think so at the time. Well, I did n't kill Thompson, though I tried to hard enough; but he died of thirst and

Barbara

hunger soon afterward. Then I was left alone to wander on and on."

Barbara was clinging to him and now weeping convulsively. Roger heard her sobs and looked up into her face. His bruised and bandaged countenance took on something of pitying tenderness.

"It was an awful thing for you, dear, was n't it? and for both of us! Words can't express it. But you were n't to blame for anything; I was to blame; I ought never to have listened to Thompson's suggestions of gold on the San Juan, and I ought not to have given way to my craze to see the cliff dwellings. I was all to blame, dear!"

He pressed her hand as if asking for forgiveness.

"It was a terrible thing, but I suffered for it—God! how I suffered! You can't know—you can't realize it—no one can! Only one who has been through it. It fevers me to think of it. I went mad for water, I think, for I remember dimly of rushing here and there, hunting for it, of digging into the sand, and of begging God to give me water or kill me. The memory of it fires my blood. Thompson used to come to me, after his death, and sit on the sand and leer and jeer at me, and hold out

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the letter and ask me to read it and curse myself for the way I had treated my wife. And sometimes he would be ahead of me, and swing on, pointing out water holes; and I would follow him, and then he would drift away and no water would be there. At times everything became hazy and I floated over the sand in a sort of bloody mist."

"Don't! don't, Roger!" Barbara urged, as she had urged a dozen times before.

"You can't realize the horror of it!" he panted, dropping back on his pillow.

She smoothed his damp hair with fingers that trembled.

"Don't tell me any more about it now, Roger. No one can realize such an experience, I suppose, who has n't lived it, but I realized something of it when I read your book. I knew that you had put your own life into that."

"That book was not a dream, then!" he exclaimed. "I did write a book, did I? Let me see! What was the title of it?"

"'Barbara,'" she replied; "'the Confessions of a Spirit.'"

"Yes," he said, flushing with pride as the old literary instinct struggled in his breast, "I remember all about it now. It threw the critics

Barbara

into a hopeless muddle. Those fellows can never agree about anything, though they set themselves on such a pinnacle!"

He became quiet now, and when Barbara had again seated herself by the bed, once more with his hand in hers, he lay looking up at the ceiling in silence. Reawakened memory was busy piecing together many things.

"I don't know just how I got out of the desert," he said at last. "I think I was found, though, by some prospectors. I know that I was insane, for when I came to myself I was in the asylum."

He studied the ceiling.

"Yes, I recall now that they told me I had been found in the desert by prospectors, in a crazed and destitute condition. When I came to myself in the asylum everything I had ever been or done seemed to have been blotted out of my mind, except a knowledge that I was there in the asylum and had an existence and must have had some sort of a past. I could n't remember even my own name, and they called me Talbot Barnes, because that name was on the card in my pocket. I thought it must be my name, and accepted it and used it."

He stopped now as if tired, and Barbara assured him that he had told her quite enough

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for one time, and that he must rest and think no more about it. Her words soothed and quieted him.

"But you forgive me?" he said, appealingly. "You forgive me for going away as I did and not getting a letter to you! I intended to let you know, and when I left Kansas I fully meant to come straight back to you from Cripple Creek. If I had done that, everything would have been all right. It was all my fault that I did n't return, after I had promised to. But you forgive me?"

"I forgive you everything, Roger!" she said, laying her hand soothingly on his bandaged forehead. "Everything!"

"And there is a good deal to forgive!"

He tried to smile, but it was a wan effort.

"But I suffered for it. Heavens, how I suffered for it! And I gained nothing. I did n't even get to see the cliff dwellings I was so crazy about. I wonder what became of Bexar's claim? That was it, was n't it? Yes, that was the name — Bexar. Queer old fellow Bexar was! If I get out of this, I think I'll run down to Cripple Creek and take a look at that claim. It is n't likely that any one has troubled it. Bexar gave it to us, I think, because it looked so unpromising."

Barbara

It was clear to Barbara that Roger was wholly unaware of the time that had elapsed since his visit to Cripple Creek. It would not do to tell him of the paying mine which had been developed from Bexar's claim. There were many things which it would not do to tell him now. She thought of Gilbert Bream with an aching heart.

"I was worse than the proverbial lost sheep, when I left the asylum," Roger went on, after a minute or so in which he seemed to be thinking of Bexar's claim. "I was discharged from the asylum as cured; but how can a man be cured when he has no memory of the past and does n't even know who he is? But they sent me out as cured. I had a hard time of it, after that. I did n't know what I had been or where I had lived or what I had followed; I did n't know if I had any trade or profession. For weeks, it seems to me, I must have been in a hazy dream; perhaps it was for months, I don't know. I looked about for work, for I had to have some way of living; and I remember now that I drove mules, and once I worked in a mine. I can't recall all the things that I did."

Barbara was passing her hand caressingly over his hair. The touch was soothing. His

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narrative had lost its first torrential force. It flagged now and then, and sometimes stopped altogether, only to be resumed a minute or so later. Such a stop came now. He appeared to be thinking, trying to recall that misty and half incoherent past. Soon he went on again, taking up the subject of his book.

“It came to me by and by that I had been a writer before I was lost in the desert and everything went from me. I was reading a story when that came to me. The story seemed to stir up that memory. I knew that I had been a writer, and it seemed to me that I had written books. Did I ever write any books?”

“Only this one, so far as I know.”

“That was just a fancy, then. But it seemed to me I had myself written books, and it occurred to me that what I had done once I could do again. At any rate, I knew I had some new experiences, and was sure that if experience went for anything in a writer I had something that ought to put a nib to my pen. But first I searched some libraries, thinking that if I had written any books and should come across them the reading of them might bring back the past that I could n't recall; but I could n't find anything. I know now that I

Barbara

had never written any books, but I could n't say until just now when you told me. Queer how a man's mind will go away from him in that fashion, and then come back by degrees and go away again, and then come back, as now. If I were a psychologist I should make a study of that, Barbara; and maybe I shall any way, as soon as I can get out of this. That infernal cab did me one good turn when it knocked me down and rolled over me. It may have knocked some sense out of me, but it certainly knocked a bit of memory back into me. I feel as if I had been dead, and then resurrected. You don't know how that feels, but it's mighty queer. I shall put this experience into my next book. What did you say was the title of that book?"

"Barbara: the Confessions of a Spirit."

"Oh, yes; your name! It was strange about that, but that name—your name—kept coming to me. Not the whole name, but just 'Barbara.' I could n't say that I'd ever known any one by that name, but somehow it kept coming to me, and when I decided to try to write that book I called the name of the heroine Barbara. I remember that now, and why I did it. And I put into the book a good deal of my experiences out there in the

A Strange Story

desert. It was a good idea, I think. In this next book I'll try to describe how it feels when a man has been dead and comes back to life and memory again. 'Lazarus' would n't be a bad title for it. Yes, I think I shall call it, 'Lazarus: the Story of a Resurrection.' That has a good sound, don't you think? If the idea is worked out right, such a story ought to make a hit. 'Lazarus: the Story of a Resurrection.' I like that title, and that's what I shall call my next book. It makes me want to get right out of bed and begin work on it now."

"You are exciting yourself too much," Barbara urged, as she had urged more than once before.

"Oh, no, I'm not. These things do me good. They make me feel that I'm alive again. I've been dead so long that it's good to know that I am so no longer. You can't know how queer it seems to feel that you have been dead, and then wake up and be able to recall the things you did and what you were before you died. If I can work the thing out just as I feel it, that book will be a great success — it will make a sensation. That's why I should like to begin on it right now, while it's fresh and vivid to me and I can gauge the

Barbara

sensations accurately. Sensations are very evanescent things, you know; they get away from one so quickly unless they are nailed right down. If I had a pad of paper and a pencil I could write out the whole thing right here, or enough of it to fix it in my mind."

He stared at the ceiling, and his thin fingers moved as if he were tracing letters on a pad of paper on his breast. He was quiet a long while this time. Barbara sat in perfect silence. She did not think these exciting memories and thoughts were doing him any good, but she felt that if she left him that would be only to excite him the more. The touch of her hand appeared to soothe him, and he seemed really better with her at his side.

"After I wrote that book," he said, opening his eyes, which he had closed when he stopped talking, "I believed I had once done journalistic work. I wrote the book in Aspen, where I had been working in a mine. I came on to Denver and secured a position with the 'Rocky Mountain News.' I don't know just how long ago that was. The clip that cab gave me seems to have muddled me on such things, but I suppose the people at the office will remember. That does n't matter, though. I know who I am now and what I have been,

A Strange Story

and you won't let it slip from me again, if my mind should get hazy, as it used to sometimes."

He turned from his contemplation of the ceiling and studied her face, reading in it something of her distress and perplexity, something of the anguish which tore her heart, something of the emotions that swayed her. Her face was very pale and her eyes showed still the traces of her tears. He looked, and he thought he understood. Even in this hour Roger Timberly's old selfishness was still his most dominant trait. The emotions that had so wrenched Barbara he believed to be due entirely to the fact that she had found him. He had not asked her for her story, nor did it occur to him as possible that she might have remarried after his long absence, but accepted as granted the belief that she was in every essential the Barbara he had left on the Kansas plains. Memory may slip a cog, but a man's ingrained nature never.

CHAPTER XXI

FACE TO FACE

THE thought that now Barbara would be at his side and that her continuing presence would be an assurance that memory would not again slip its cable and wander once more as a derelict out on the wide ocean of mistiness and uncertainty, seemed to comfort Roger Timberly more than anything else could have done. He grew quiet under the soothing belief, the unhealthy brightness went slowly out of his eyes, and he began to breathe naturally and easily. He was very tired and very weak. He lay back on the pillow, stared at the ceiling, and clutched her hand in his hard palm as if in emphasis of the belief that now she would be with him always, and thus holding her hand he fell asleep.

As he slept his breathing became heavy and stertorous. He struggled painfully now and then, and clutched Barbara's hand in a tighter grasp as if he feared that now when he had found her he might lose her again.

Face to Face

"Poor Roger!" said Barbara, as she gazed into the bruised and flushed face. "Poor, poor Roger!"

Then the tears came again, falling on his hard hand, and she bent over and kissed softly the bandaged face.

A nurse came, but Barbara begged that she might be permitted to sit by the patient, finally winning the nurse's consent. Though her nerves were overstrained and the watch was wearing, she again and again won consent to remain with Roger, and sat by his side throughout the long hours of the night. She did not deem it likely that Gilbert Bream would return to Denver until late in the day, if then, though she was sure that her failure to answer his letter would bring a telegram from him. But the telegram was not likely to be received until morning, and could be attended to then.

So she endeavored to turn her thoughts from Bream and from the future, a thing which she found to be quite impossible. She did not want to go home — was it her home now? She did not want to meet the servants and have them stare curiously into her ashen face. Besides, did not duty require her to remain here at the bedside of Roger Timberly, who was fighting out this awful battle with death?

Barbara

He had been her husband — he was still her husband, in spite of all that had passed.

The lights gleaming in the streets, the subdued rumble of cars and carriages, the quiet of the hospital ward, the softly moving nurses, all strongly impressed her imagination. As the slow hours wore on and the night grew even more quiet she was given abundant opportunity to think. She half started up sometimes, under the impression that she must be dreaming, or that the history of the past few months must be a dream, and had to reassure herself by a look about the room that it was neither the one nor the other, but a terrible and crushing fact.

Twice during the early part of the night a physician came in and critically studied Roger's face and pulse and listened to his heavy breathing. Each time she asked him the same question :

“Don't you think he is better, doctor?”

The last time she received the answer :

“It is impossible to tell yet. He is quieter, and we hope that he is better. But his injuries were not only of the head, they were internal, and they were severe. The time that has elapsed is in his favor, and the fact that he seems to be no worse is a good indication.”

Face to Face

Then he directed Barbara how to give certain medicines in case Roger awoke, and went away. Shortly after midnight a change became manifest in Roger's condition. He grew more restless, tossing to and fro and moaning. The doctor was standing by the bed at the time, and Barbara looked into his face in anxious inquiry.

"It's a favorable indication," he said. "I have been fearing that he might fall into a stupor."

Barbara could hear her own heart beat when she asked:

"Do you think he will get well, doctor?"

She hung breathlessly on the reply:

"This marks an improvement; yes, I think he will get well."

Did the sigh with which this was received indicate that Barbara was rejoiced or depressed? Was it glad news, or the reverse? It is often so hard to analyze the inner feelings of one's own heart that it is doubtful if she could have answered these questions herself. The thought that he might die choked her. But—if he lived?

Thus Barbara sat through the long watches of the night, insensible to fatigue, ever studying Roger's bruised and bandaged face, and

Barbara

giving the medicines when he roused up with the carefulness of a trained nurse. For hours at a time she hardly moved. Looking at her, as she bent forward in her chair, one might have thought that she had fallen asleep, but her active mind was thinking, thinking, thinking.

The gray of morning came at last, brightening and flushing into the full dawn. Denver began to buzz and hum like an awakening hive. Trucks and milk carts rumbled by. The noise increased to a dull roar after sunrise, but Barbara could still hear the quick sounds of footsteps passing to and fro in the street. Suddenly she half leaped from her chair. A firm and rather heavy yet uneven tread had turned aside toward the hospital steps. She rose to her feet and listened, her white face seamed with anxiety. She believed the footsteps were those of Gilbert Bream.

A little later, standing thus in strained attitude and shaking like a leaf, she caught the sound of Bream's well-remembered voice, as he spoke to one of the hospital attendants. The moment which Barbara had feared and from which she had shrunk had come. She tried to steady herself that she might pass out

Face to Face

of the ward and meet him in the corridor, but all the strength went out of her body and she sank limply back into the chair.

Gilbert Bream did not know to what he was moving. Induced by anxiety to return to Denver on the earliest morning train, he had been spoken to as he approached the hospital, which he had to pass on his way home—spoken to by some one engaged there, who knew his wife by sight and thought it possible he would like to know that she was inside. So, never dreaming of the truth, Gilbert Bream turned from the attendant at the door, passed down the corridor and entered the hospital ward.

He beheld Barbara crouching in the chair beside the cot and was startled by the face she turned upon him. He had never seen it so white and ghastly. He could not understand why she was there and why she should look so. He was on the point of rushing to her, but staggered on his feet as he looked past her to the cot and recognized the man lying there as Roger Timberly. Bream could not be mistaken in that face, bandaged and bruised though it was. Those features were stamped on his heart. How could he fail to recognize Roger Timberly even in that disguise? He had seen

Barbara

him, and he had studied every line of Roger's photograph a thousand times.

The question Bream was about to ask Barbara died on his lips. Nevertheless, he crossed the room and put his arm about her. The motion was one of protection, though he did not know it. Barbara rose to her feet as he lifted her, but she did not say a word.

"I must take you home," he said, in tones that trembled. "You are — are worn out."

"Yes, I'll go home," she answered. "We cannot talk here, and I must talk to you or die."

She tottered as Bream led her from the building, and was in an almost fainting condition when she reached the street. Weak from long watching and the intense mental strain to which she had been subjected, his sudden appearance had unnerved her.

Bream supported her tenderly to the corner, then called a cab and assisted her into it. He was silent, except for this, and Barbara could not tell how he was bearing the shock, though she thought now and then that she felt his strong form quiver. She had not the courage to look into his face. Still, his loving assistance was pleasant, and though she had a vague feeling that duty and propriety required her

Face to Face

to shrink from this man who was not her husband, she clung pitiably to him in spite of this feeling, as the timid and frightened child clings to its father. The cabman, urged to haste, drove like Jehu, and throughout the drive Barbara's trembling form was supported in Bream's strong arms. At the end of the journey, when the cab door was opened, he lifted her out bodily, and assisted her into the house.

"Tell me about it," he said, when they were alone together.

"I can't—I can't!" she urged, shrinking from him for the first time.

Then she again nerved herself for the ordeal, and instead of sinking down and covering her face with her hands, as he thought she meant to do, she took a newspaper from the table and gave it to him, pointing with trembling finger to the account given of the accident to Talbot Barnes.

"You remember the book you brought me?" she asked, in a choking voice,—" 'Barbara: the Confessions of a Spirit'? It was written by Roger, though it did not appear under his name. He had forgotten his real name, and was passing under the name of Talbot Barnes."

Barbara

Her voice broke a little ; but she went bravely on, and in a few sentences contrived to convey to him the substance of what she had learned concerning Roger.

"I am still his wife," she said, her lips quivering pathetically.

A sudden despair tugged at the heart of Gilbert Bream. He put his arm about her and drew her tenderly toward him.

"Is it fair?" he urged, his face now very pale and set. "Is it right? I feel that I cannot live without you, Barbara! I have become the man that I am through your influence and love. You do not know how you have uplifted and helped me. Without you I can never be anything. Does n't that give me a claim — such a claim as no man ever had on the woman he loved?"

"Don't tempt me, Gilbert?" she begged weakly. "You would not have me live with you, if I am not your wife? Roger did not desert me. He would have come back to me, but he could not. He tried to send a letter to me, and through the fault of another it never reached me. He has not divorced me; he has not remarried. He does not realize yet how long the time has been, but seems to think that I have come on from Kansas, drawn to

Face to Face

Denver by that newspaper report. He has no thought but that I am still his wife—and I am still his wife.”

She tried to go on, but became hysterical and drew away from him.

“You are nervous—worn out; you have not been well, you know!” he urged. “Let me send for the physician.”

“No,” she said, her voice dry and hard. “I do not need a doctor, and there might be troublesome questions if he came. I feel faint and sick. If you will leave me alone a little while!”

He hesitated; but seeing her appealing look he went out of the room, then passed into a corridor where he paced nervously and anxiously up and down, grieved, hurt, and with a mind surcharged with uneasy forebodings.

When he returned to the room finally, she asked him gravely if he would not go to the hospital, and leave word there for Roger that she was too ill to return to him at once, but would try to visit him in the afternoon or evening.

“Not this evening?” said Bream in protest.

“Yes,” she said firmly. “I must, Gilbert; my duty is there!”

“But you are not able to go.”

Barbara

"I think I shall be able, after a little. It has tried me very much, you know; but I shall be stronger again by and by. You would not have me stay away from him, would you?"

"No," he answered, slowly and with hesitation. "I suppose not, but —"

"He may die at any time, though the doctor thought he was getting better; but the case is a very critical one. I feel that I must go to him as soon as I can, and in the meantime if he should ask for me I should like him to know that he may expect my return soon. You will go, and you will deliver the message, won't you?"

Bream hesitated again.

"Yes, I will go, and I will deliver the message," he promised; "but I don't see how you can hope to go back there to-day. You have n't the strength to walk or to ride, and if you wear yourself out as you've been doing — Yes, I will go!"

He turned toward the door with a very grave face; then stopped; stepping back he kissed her silently, and went out of the room again.

Perhaps Barbara did not know how hard a task she had set Gilbert Bream. She could not have chosen a harder. He fought for the mastery of himself as he went slowly down the

Face to Face

stairs and to the street. He felt all his good resolutions, all his better manhood, slipping away from him. Why had Roger Timberly returned, after dropping out of life altogether for so long a time? Would he live, and would he tear away the woman who had so changed the life of another man? Bream fought the fight to a finish, as he thought, by the time his feet touched the pavement; then he turned toward the hospital, bent on obeying Barbara's wishes in every particular.

At the hospital Bream gave his name to an attendant at the door and entered the ward where Roger Timberly lay. As he approached the cot, Roger opened his eyes and stared about, and began to call for Barbara in a tone that went through Bream like a sword point. He stood for a moment, looking into the ghastly face and burning eyes, racked by strange emotions, then delivered the message to Roger himself, for he saw that Roger was conscious. Bream was pale and perturbed as he delivered the message, and Roger stared hard at him as if he did not comprehend.

Fortunately a doctor bustled in at this moment, relieving a situation that might have become embarrassing. The doctor knew Bream and greeted him cordially.

Barbara

"You're her friend, and have just come from her?" Roger asked pettishly, still staring at Bream. "Why did she go away?"

Bream was about to reply, but the doctor interrupted by saying that the lady had watched very faithfully and was no doubt worn out.

The physician's words stopped further petulant questions on the part of Roger, and Bream breathed more freely. Nevertheless, his heart hammered unpleasantly as he looked into Roger's face, though he contrived to retain his outward calm. Had Roger been any other man than he was, Gilbert Bream would have pitied him sincerely.

The doctor took a seat by the cot and began to ask some questions of the patient, but Bream heard scarcely a word that he said. He was looking at Roger, and as he observed the leaden pallor of the features he found it impossible to crowd out the swift thought, which came almost as a hope, that the injuries would prove fatal.

After a few words with the doctor he requested that if any change in Roger's condition became manifest, information of the fact should be sent to his residence.

"My God! I cannot give her up! I will not give her up!"

That was the wild cry that rose in his soul,

Face to Face

as, on leaving the hospital, he sought to be just to Roger, to Barbara, and to himself.

"I cannot live without her. For years that man has been in the land of the dead — dead mentally, if not physically ; and now he comes back, to snatch Barbara away from me ! It is more than I can stand."

But as Gilbert Bream moved away from the hospital, from that cot and what it held, the movement and life of the city, the blue benignant sky, and more than all Barbara's white pathetic face rising now before him, enabled him to withstand this fierce torrent of feeling.

"Such thoughts make me unworthy of her," he reflected. "She is an angel among women. If I could but summon strength to do as she would do and feel as she would feel under such circumstances, I might be able to assure myself that I am still a man."

It was quite impossible for him to do anything of the kind ; yet the aspiration was beneficial.

Barbara listened in silence as he delivered his message and made his report concerning Roger ; then she became quite apathetic, and a noticeable restraint convinced him that she preferred to be alone with her thoughts. This preference he respected, and left her. He had a

Barbara

battle of his own to fight, and could guess something of the conflict that was raging in her heart.

Late that evening a messenger appeared from the hospital, with information that Roger seemed to be much worse and called for "Barbara" constantly. Bream was with Barbara when this message was delivered. He looked at her and saw that she meant to go to the hospital.

"Shall I go with you?" he asked, rising.

She stood for an instant in hesitation.

"No, I think I had better go alone."

The decision hurt Bream, even though he recognized that it was a wise one. It seemed as if she had deliberately thrust him out of her life and heart, when he could not be permitted to go with her as her husband, to stand by her and to comfort her in whatever of grief and anguish she might be called on to endure. But it was better so, he knew, and he said not a word of protest.

Roger had been delirious, but the clouds cleared from his mind when he heard Barbara's voice. He looked up with a gasping sigh and caught her hand.

"I — I — thought — I — was — in — the — desert — again!" he said, with a shudder, clinging to her hand as if he feared its release would

Face to Face

drift him once more into the terrible land of thirst and death from which her voice had summoned him.

Barbara knelt at his side, spoke to him soothingly, held his hard, calloused hands in her own soft palms, and under this influence he sank apparently into sleep. But it was not a natural sleep, as she could tell by his labored breathing. When the physician came in, she questioned him earnestly in low tones as to Roger's true condition.

"His life hangs in the balance," was the answer. "It is the toss up of a penny either way. I have seen many men get well whose conditions were worse, and I have also seen many men die whose conditions were not so bad. It all depends on his vitality. If he lives until morning, he will probably recover."

The physician retreated as softly as he had come, and Barbara, with Roger's hot hand still in her own, bent her head forward against his bosom.

"Oh, most merciful and just God!" was her prayer; "Thou who seest the past and the future, and all of this life and the next, and knowest our hearts and our needs better than we can know them ourselves, look down upon us and pity us, Thy children."

Barbara

A long time Barbara knelt thus in prayer, pouring out the burden of her troubled heart. She was aroused by Roger's restlessness.

The change feared by the physicians came shortly after midnight and Roger sank rapidly. But until the last he clung pathetically to Barbara's hand. When the end had come, and she crouched by the cot with raining tears, her strongest emotion was thankfulness that in his wildest ravings it had never occurred to him that she might have wedded another.

.
After the solemn ceremony again uniting Barbara and Gilbert Bream she turned to her husband.

"Until death do us part, Gilbert!" she said, gravely reverent.

And he, laying a kiss on her lips, answered:
"Amen!"



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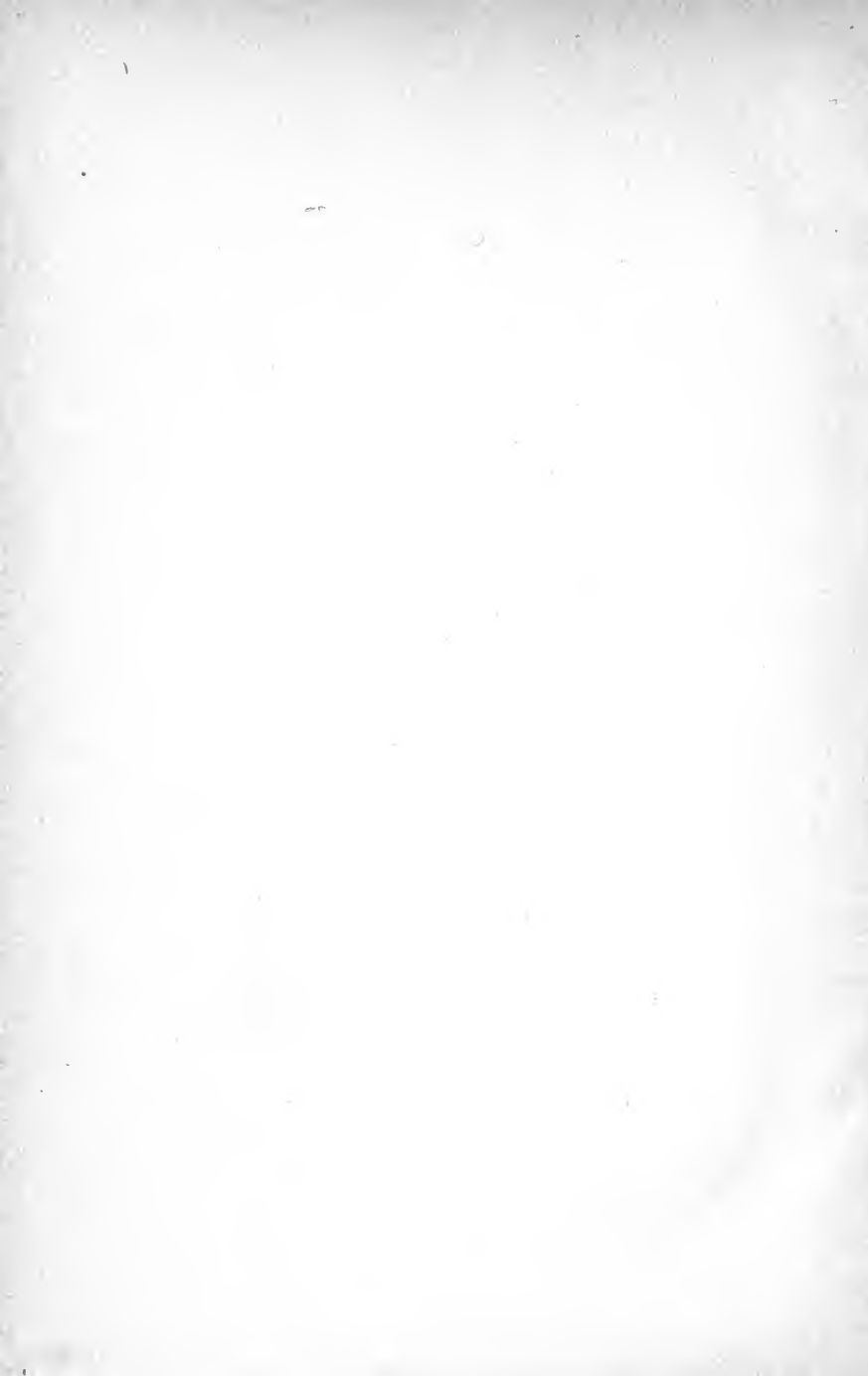
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